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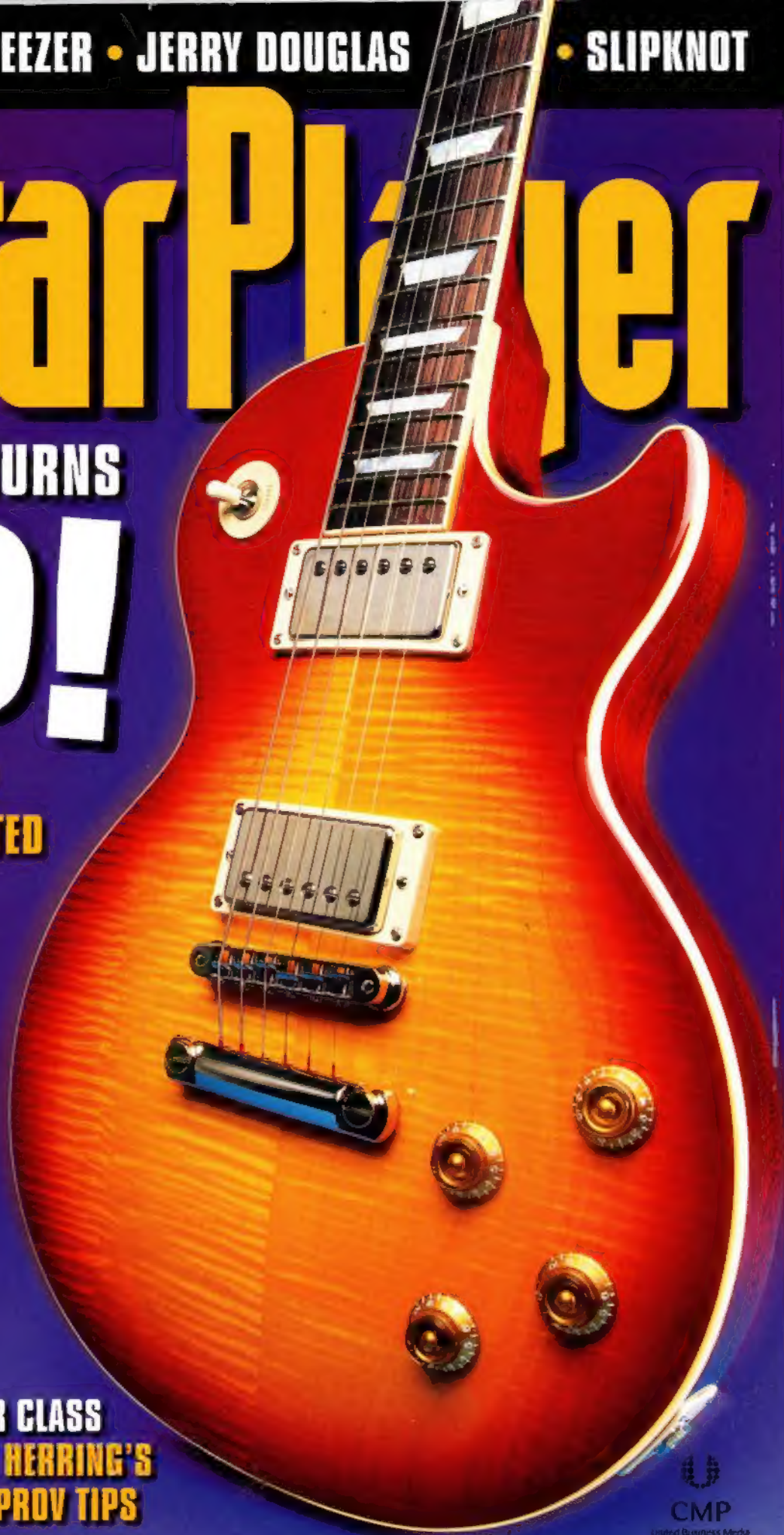
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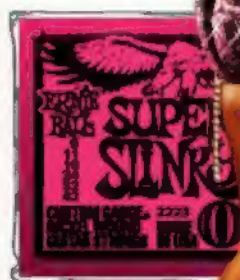
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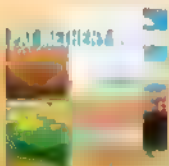
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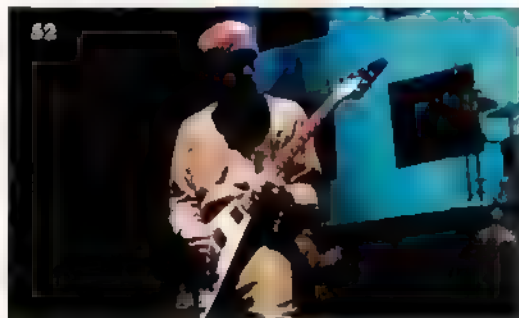
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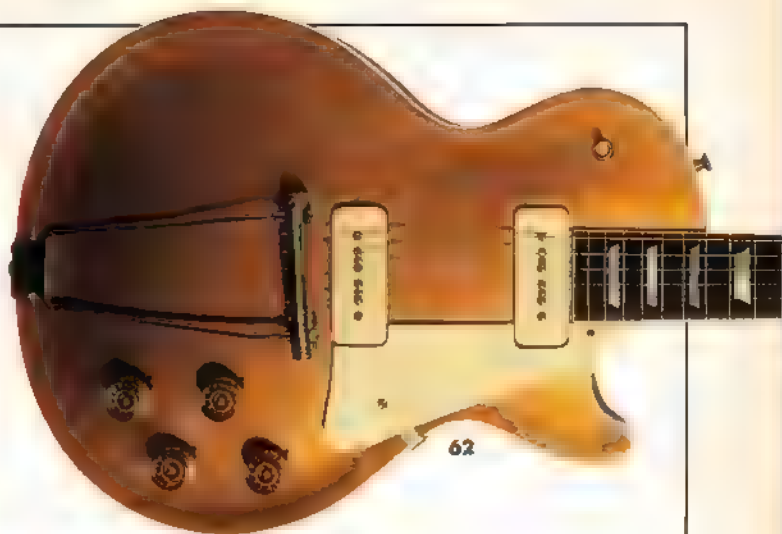
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144 Encore: Steve Vai, 1986

My love affair with the Les Paul began with Mick Ronson. He was performing with David Bowie's Spiders from Mars on an early '70s segment of *Don Kirshner's Rock Concert*, and I couldn't take my eyes off him. He was the rock god I wasn't and ached to be. He was confident, cool, and utterly fabulous. And he was holding the most beautiful guitar I had ever seen—a blond Les Paul. At that moment, my teenaged brain projected all that was holy about rock and roll into that guitar. Then I discovered Marc Bolan and his sunburst, Pete Townshend's collection of numbered Pauls, and a host of other LP players. My first electric was a cheap Les Paul copy, and I waited for that blissful day when I could afford the real thing. (For the record, that year was 1978, and the model was a Les

Paul Standard.)

Of course, I soon figured out that Strats, Teles, Rickenbackers, Guilds, and Gretsches were amazing guitars, as well—they just shouted it out with different voices. That discovery kicked off my unrepentant life as a gear junkie, and I've owned everything from those classics to modern wonders by Schecter, ESP, Jackson, McInturff, Fernandes, and Godin. Like many *GP* readers, my garage, studio, and closets are filled with an ever-expanding family of groovy guitars. And this happy obsession began with the sight of a glam guitar hero making tremendously hip noises with a stunning hunk of wood

This year, that "hunk" turns 50, and *GP* pays homage in this issue with excerpts from Tony Bacon's *50 Years of the Gibson Les Paul*, an interview with Les Paul

himself, and a gear roundup of five new Les Paul models. If you're a real zealot, seek out our December '98 cover story, "Legends of the Paul," which focused on 13 fab LP guitarists. (To complete your research of some seminal guitars, check out *GP*'s "Titans of the Tele" [May '98], "Strat-O-Masters" [July '99], "The History of Rickenbacker" [May-June '85], and "Gretsch Gallery" [October '83].) Although it kind of pisses me off that the Les Paul has maintained its good looks throughout the decades—I've just aged—I can't begrudge the guitar a happy Golden Anniversary. Here's looking forward to a century of licks, riffs, and bratty noises!

This issue also marks the latest step in our ongoing enhancement of *Guitar Player*. We assembled our lesson material into one section in the June '02 *GP*, and now



assistant editor Jude Gold has revamped Chops Builder. It's simply called Chops now, and Jude has upgraded the offerings with a Guest Guru column and a music-book review. He assures me other innovations will follow. (Now you're on the spot, Jude!) The Chops redesign lets us provide readers with more focused—and more fun—tools for improving their musicality. We hope the section continues to inspire you, as well as encourage you to play better.

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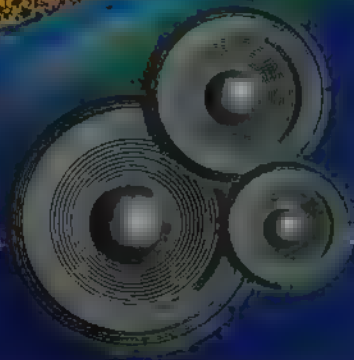
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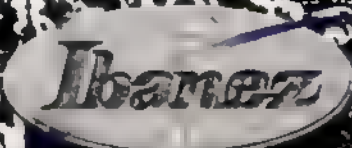
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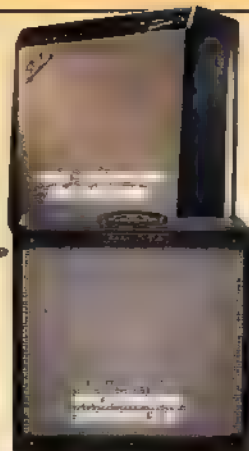




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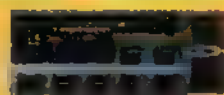
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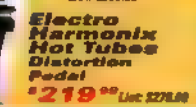
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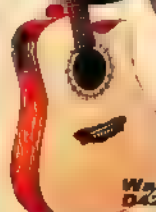
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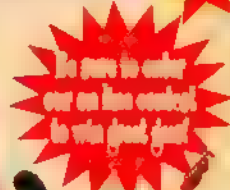


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Feedback

Eric Sardinas

I want to thank you for finally covering Eric Sardinas [May '02]. I have been a huge fan of Eric's for a long time. I saw him live, and, since then, I've been hooked. His live shows are so amazing—he's like no one else I've ever seen! You can't help but feel every note he plays, and with the energy he puts out, you will not find one person in the crowd that is not totally into the show.

I have been playing guitar for six years, and Eric is a huge inspiration. I hope that you continue to interview this up-and-coming artist because he is truly the next guitar god.

Lissa Quintana
Los Angeles, CA

Steve Morse

In your too-short interview with Steve Morse [May '02], I take exception to the last question's implication that a monster player like Steve is a dinosaur these days. I would rather listen to Morse's (or Steve Vai's or Steve Howe's or Eric Johnson's) angst-and-stress music than

some 20-something 7-string basher. Steve's right—there still is good guitar music to be made, and his music is far more than merely clever. Keep wailing, Steve. We're still listening, buying, appreciating, and being moved by you.

Chris Shaw
Via Internet

Stuck in Cali?

I'm a long-time subscriber, and will be for a long time. I loved the articles on Greg Koch [Dec. '01] and Monte Montgomery [May '02'], but I can't help wondering what took so long! I've followed both of these guys for years, but *GP* is supposed to be on the cutting edge. In Monte's piece, you mention he's never been to the West Coast. So what? Neither have I, but last time I checked, I can still play guitar. Believe it or not, we *do* have talent here in fly-over country. If you pulled your heads out of the California sun and open your ears, you might be surprised

Harry Koehler
Applleton, WI

Harry—We appreciate all groovy guitarists no matter where they roam. I'm sorry if you detected a California bias—and, hey,

it is pretty idyllic here—but we're extremely happy that hot players spring up all over the map. Regarding your "cutting edge" comment: We do keep our ears to the streets and scan the trades and the Web for new talent, but it's much appreciated when someone writes in (or calls) to alert us to a transcendent player. Don't be a stranger! —MM

Danny Gatton

While perusing your "New Gear 2002" spread [May '02]—and composing a major wish list—I came upon your review of the new Danny Gatton boxed CD set. I was particularly taken by the description of one disc as being like "walking into a dive club" to hear a master play. I had just such an experience in 1991, when a friend told me I had to see this guy. We walked into a dive pizza parlor in Alexandria, Virginia, paid our \$2 cover for an afternoon show, and sat down in front with our pizza and beer. Gatton came on stage, and with his first solo, my jaw literally dropped into my medium Italian sausage and black olive special!

This very ordinary guy—who looked like he just got off work at a factory—put together an endless stream of amazing and incredibly

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varied riffs. I was not only floored at his execution, I was also flabbergasted that anyone could even think up doing this stuff on a guitar. Upon looking around the room, I could see my gaping mouth and whispered "oohs" and "aahs" were being repeated around the room. (Much pizza was getting cold, and much beer was going flat while he played.) For those readers who have not heard Danny Gatton play, give this boxed CD set a listen. I feel truly fortunate that I got to see this one-of-a-kind guitar player before his untimely death.

John Helmer
Santa Barbara, CA

Jerry Was Right

Jerry Donahue's "My Favorite *Guitar Player*" [Toolbox, May '02] was so relevant to me. I had just seen Scotty Anderson play the night before reading Jerry's remembrances. Here he was, playing to seven people in this tiny bar on the northside of Cincinnati, yet he played like he was playing to a full house. It was four hours of the most mind-boggling playing I had ever witnessed. And just like Jerry D. said, this is a guy who is so down to earth. You couldn't pay Scotty a compliment—everything was "nothing special, really." When I

brought up the profile that GP did on him last year, he just laughed and said it was nice of "y'all." He then spent ten minutes with me, sitting at the bar having a beer, and talking about guitars, pickups, amps, and the like.

What a class act. And even though it was terribly sad to see him playing to so few people, I got an up-close lesson in master guitar playing—as well as how to be humble. I've been back several times to see him play. What luck to have such an incredible player in my own backyard.

Dean Ulmer
Cincinnati, OH

OOPS!

When we tried to correct a *Dream Machines* error in the May '02 Feedback, we once again got THD Electronic's phone number wrong. The correct number—once and for all—is (206) 781-5500. We're very, very sorry for the "serial" goof up.

In other phone number news, the contact number for ESP in the May "New Gear 2002" report was also incorrect. (Sometimes, you just have to laugh at your bad luck!) The correct number is (800) 423-8388.

A few points were misreported in our an-



nouncement of the Burns Brian May Signature Edition guitar in the April '02 "New Gear." The body and neck are made of mahogany, not basswood and maple, as stated. And the correct retail price is \$1,395.

Address correspondence to Feedback, c/o Guitar Player, 2800 Campus Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403, or e-mail us at guilplyr@musicplayer.com. GP regrets that until the advent of the 40-hour workday we will not be able to answer every letter.



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INPUT OUTPUT

FRETWIRE

EXPERIENCE HENDRIX: Be sure to check out MCA's recent DVD/VHS release compiling **Jimi Hendrix's** two 1969 appearances on the *Dick Cavett Show*. The 90-minute feature includes both appearances in their entirety (with the original commercials); performances of "Isabella," "Machine Gun," and "Hear My Train a Comin';" and Cavett's questions to Hendrix about the then-recent performance at Woodstock. You also get a 60-minute documentary featuring interviews with Cavett and Hendrix bandmates **Mitch Mitchell** and **Billy Cox**. ... **NOT SUCH A SUPERGROUP AFTER ALL:** It was announced in March that ex-Soundgarden frontman **Chris Cornell** decided to leave the unnamed supergroup he had formed with **Rage Against the Machine's** **Tom Morello**, **Brad Wilk**, and **Tim Commerford**. A reason for the split was not identified at press time, and was quite surprising, as the group had been confirmed to play this year's **Ozzfest** just days earlier. (They've since been replaced by **Andrew W.K.**) It's reported the group has recorded an album's worth of material for Epic Records, which may still be released this summer. . .

ROCK WITH A CONSCIOUS: In 1999, Louis Posen founded **Sub City Records**—an imprint of Southern California's mega-indie label Hopeless Records—in an effort to meld social awareness and good old-fashioned punk rock. The label donates five percent of the suggested retail price

FIELD TEST Peterson VS-1



Peterson rotating-disc strobe tuners have long been the choice of guitar techs. However, due to the cost and size of these motor-driven units, relatively few players take advantage of their unparalleled accuracy. Now, Peterson has brought

strobe technology down to size with the VS-1 (\$320 retail/\$199 street).

Powered by three AA batteries (or the included AC adapter), the chromatic device uses a backlit LCD display to simulate a strobe's moving bars. An encoder

knob and a pair of menu buttons make navigating the VS-1's options quick and easy.

Using the VS-1 to check my Strat's intonation hardly required busting into its plethora of features—which include automatic/manual note selection, selectable historical temperaments, "sweetened" guitar tunings, key transposition, and the ability store custom user settings—but the unit's fast response and superb accuracy sure made the job easy. (Accuracy is within 1/1000th of a semitone, and the response is as fast as a real strobe tuner.) The VS-1 defaults to auto note detection/selection when you power up. Pluck a string, and when the large bars at the left side of the display stop moving, you know your pitch is dead on.

Whether your tuning needs are simple or extreme, the VS-1 has you covered. It offers a bass mode (which allows for visual tuning of pitches as low as 16Hz!), a 1/4" audio line out, a built-in microphone, and even a concert-A reference that's adjustable in 0.5Hz increments. It all adds up to the VS-1 being one of the most exacting and flexible tuners you can stuff into a gig bag.

—ART THOMPSON

LIVE WIRES Slipknot

Slipknot guitarists Mick Thomson and James Root may look like friends of Freddy Krueger, but concealed beneath the masks are two players whose distinct styles are an essential part of the group's furious, multi-platinum-selling sound.

On the road, Thomson's arms of choice are four B.C. Rich guitars loaded with EMG-81 (bridge) and EMG-89 (neck) pickups. Two Warlocks are strung with Ernie Balls, gauged .011, .015, .018, .028, .038, .058 for dropped-B tuning, and an ST and a flame-maple-topped Warlock are strung .012, .016, .020, .030, .040, .068 for dropped-A tuning. He uses Dunlop Jazz III picks that he scores on the sides for a better grip.

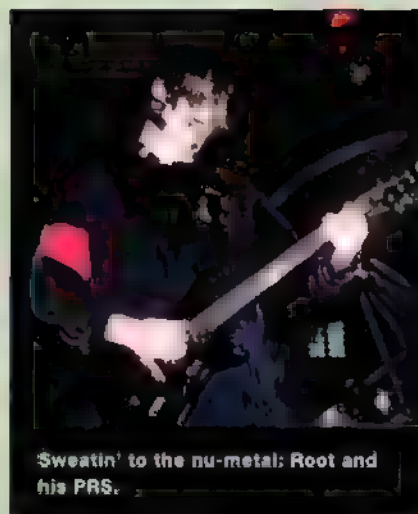
Thomson runs two wireless systems—a Sony WRR-800 and a Sennheiser E-Series—to simplify guitar changes. Both wireless receivers are patched to a Whirlwind Multi-Selector, and routed through a Boss NS-2 noise gate to a Custom Audio Electronics 4x4 Audio Controller. Next, a Whirlwind A/B/Y box is used to split the signal to two VHT Pittbull Ultra-Lead heads. Two Boss GX700 multi-effectors are inserted in the effects loops of each amp, and an Electro-Harmonix Bass Balls envelope follower is connected through a loop in the C.A.E. 4x4. One VHT head powers two Carvin 4x12 cabinets loaded with Carvin BR12 speakers, and the other powers an offstage Randall Isolation box loaded with a Carvin BR12 speaker. Rack power and light are furnished by a Furman PL-Pro, and Thomson's tech, Kevin Miles, uses a C.A.E. RS-10 master controller to manage all amps and effects from offstage.

Root favors four custom-built Paul Reed Smith Custom 24s loaded with EMG-81 (bridge) and EMG-85 (neck) pickups, single volume controls, and 3-way pickup selectors. Root uses the same Ernie Ball set as Thomson for dropped-B, but chooses .012, .016, .020, .034, .044, .064 for dropped-A. He prefers D'Andrea 1mm picks.

Root's guitar signal is transmitted to his rack via a Shure UHF wireless system patched to a Whirlwind Multi-Selector, and then to a Korg DTR-1 tuner, an Electro-Harmonix Micro Synthesizer, and a Boss NS-2 noise gate. Finally, a Whirlwind Selector A/B/Y box disburses the signal to two



Thomson giving his B.C. Rich some lovin' onstage.



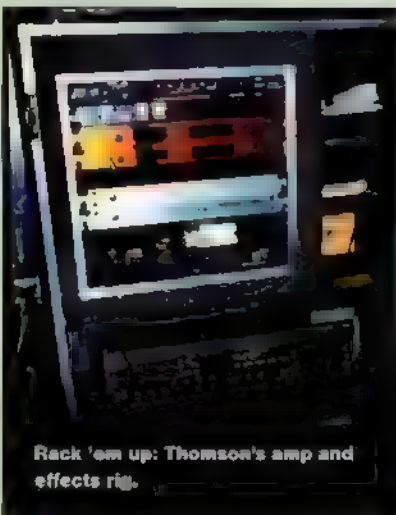
Sweatin' to the nu-metal: Root and his PRS.



Thomson's cadre of angst-ridden B.C. Riches.



Root's posse of PRS Custom 24s.



Rack 'em up: Thomson's amp and effects rig.



Root's amp and effects rack.

Mesa/Boogie Dual Caliber DC-10 heads. One DC-10 powers a pair of Boogie 4x12 cabinets loaded with Celestion Vintage 30s, while the other DC-10 powers a Randall Isolation box also loaded with a Vintage 30.

Rack power and light are provided by a Furman PL-Plus.

—LISA SHARKEN

Thanks to Kevin Miles and Martin Connors for providing technical info.

FRETWIRE

from all releases to a charity of the band's choosing. Three years and 20 releases later, they've raised more than \$100,000 for organizations such as National Hopeline Network, Art City, Radiation and Public Health, and the Foundation for Fighting Blindness. "It's one thing to purchase music by a band you like," said Posen, "but it's another to purchase a record and know that there is a bigger idea at work behind its release."

PASSING NOTES: Marc Moreland, lead guitarist for '80s new wave band *Wall of Voodoo*, died on March 13 of complications from a liver transplant. He was 44. *Wall of Voodoo* was formed in 1978, and was best known for the 1984 hit "Mexican Radio." The group disbanded in 1988. ... **BEST OF BALTIMORE:**

As Founder and Managing General Partner of PRS Guitars, Ltd., Paul Reed Smith was honored as the 2002 Maryland Small Business Person of the Year. Chosen by the U.S. Small Business Administration's Baltimore District office, the criteria included staying power, growth in the number of employees, increase in sales, contributions to the community, and innovations in products or services. Smith now goes on to compete for the regional and national honors, as well. Congratulations!

... **HERE A LABEL, THERE A LABEL:** Joel and Ethan Cohen—the filmmaking brothers responsible for *O Brother, Where Art Thou*—in conjunction with the soundtrack's producer, T-Bone Burnett, have focused their musical energies into a new record label, **DMZ Records**. With an advisory board consisting of **Elvis Costello**, **Tom Waits**, and **Bono**, as well filmmakers **Calle Khouri**, **Sam Shepard**, and **Wim Wen-**

GEORGE GRUHN'S RARE BIRD 1933 Gibson Nick Lucas

When Gibson introduced its first artist-endorsed model in 1928, it marked an important milestone in the company's history. Bearing the name of Nick Lucas—an incredibly talented fingerstylist who garnered fame with the hit "Tiptoe Through the Tulips"—this flat-top is among the finest Gibsons ever produced, with a gorgeous sound well suited for both fingerpicking and flatpicking.

From its introduction until production ceased in 1938, the Nick Lucas model went through many changes, but the two constants were an interior label with a photo of Lucas holding the first version of the guitar, and a body typically measuring 4⁵/₈" deep at the end pin.

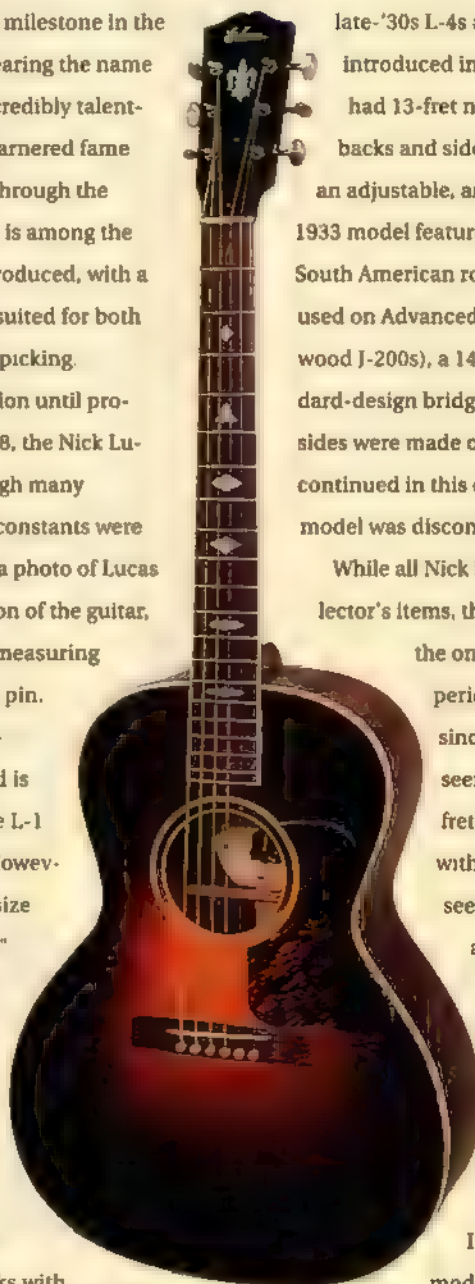
The 1928 model measures 13¹/₂" wide, and is the same shape as the L-1 of the same period. However, in 1929, the body size was enlarged to 14³/₄" wide, with the same shape as the 1933 model shown here [serial #90562].

The earliest Lucas guitars featured mahogany backs and sides, and 12-fret necks with fretboard inlays similar to those on the TB-5 Gibson banjos from 1923 and 1924. (The typical inlay pattern seen here—which is the

same as those on Gibson's TB-2 banjos from 1925 to 1929, as well as early-'30s L-7s, and late-'30s L-4s and A-50 mandolins—was introduced in '28.) By 1932, Lucases had 13-fret necks, Brazilian-rosewood backs and sides, trapeze tailpieces, and an adjustable, archtop-style bridge. This 1933 model features a back and sides of South American rosewood (the same type used on Advanced Jumbos and early rosewood J-200s), a 14-fret neck, and a standard-design bridge. By 1934, the back and sides were made of curly maple, and they continued in this configuration until the model was discontinued.

While all Nick Lucas guitars are rare collector's items, the rarest variation by far is the one depicted here. In my experience collecting guitars since 1963, I had never seen—or even heard of—a 14-fret rosewood Lucas model with the standard bridge until seeing a photo of one in an auction catalog a little over a year ago. Since then, I have come to own two—including the one in this photo. Besides these two and the auction-catalog guitar, I've only seen one other model like this. While I strongly

suspect that more exist, this is one of the rarest and most desirable of all Gibson flat-top guitars. —GEORGE GRUHN, gruhn.com



TECHNO TOOLS

Freaks of Frankfurt

This year marked the 23rd anniversary of the annual Musikmesse in Frankfurt, Germany—the world's largest musical-instrument trade show. Plenty of the guitars at Musikmesse never make it to stateside retailers, so I thought I'd offer a recap on some eccentric axes I've affectionately dubbed "Freaks of Frankfurt."

Travel guitars were big this year, and Risa (risa-music.de) makes some funky little road warriors. The 17"-scale Gitarlele is tuned either a fourth or a fifth above standard, and features a rosewood-topped alder neck, volume and tone controls, lipstick-tube single-coils, and a choice of solid or hollow body styles. Not weird enough? Try Risa's 4-string version (tuned like a ukelele), the 8-string model (in mandola tuning), or the headless Uke-Stick.

The Bone—by Triff of Switzerland (the-bone.ch)—is another high-end travel guitar that features a one-piece maple core to which you can attach stainless-steel "body clips" to give it the look of a modernistic electric. Other features include an ebony fretboard, a humbucker that operates in parallel or series, and tiny tuners behind the bridge.

In the "Mad Genius" category, the Thidell guitar (thidell.com) offers 31 frets per octave (56 frets total), for what the company claims is the purest possible intonation. All frets are intonated and compensated, and other features include three single-coils, a fretboard available in exotic woods, double truss rods, and a "synchron" bridge that keeps the strings in tune when using the tremolo.

Being that we live in the Plastic Age, Switch Music offers plastic guitars that use what they call "Mechanical Tone Modeling"—a system that allows you to insert various tone modules into the guitar body. Purportedly, the modules connect to "tone tunnels" inside the body that pick up string vibrations and conduct their energy through the instrument. Switch claims this can simulate various types of wood—an important factor in ecology-conscious Europe.

Another ax made of synthetic materials is the one-piece Catalyst Panthera guitar (catalyst-instruments.com). The Panthera is made of a ceramic-graphite composite that the company calls SoundCompound, and they claim its millions of microscopic glass bubbles act like resonators to improve upon the acoustic and mechanical properties of even the finest woods.

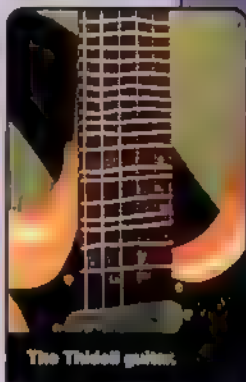
—CRAIG ANDERTON



The Risa Gitarlele.



Triff's The Bone.



The Thidell guitar.



The Catalyst Panthera.

STUDIO LOG



Tracking "No Light"

Album: *Lost Angel* (Hollywood Records) by 3rd Strike

Parts: All.

Guitarists: Todd Deguchi and Erik Carlsson.

Guitars: Ibanez AX220 Custom (Deguchi); Ibanez S Classic (Carlsson).

Strings: D'Addario .010-.052 (Deguchi); Ernie Ball .010-.052 (Carlsson).

Amps: Vintage Magnavox (Deguchi); three-amp rig composed of a Rivera Knucklehead, a Bogner Oberschall, and a Marshall JCM 2000 (Carlsson).

Effects: None (Deguchi); Ibanez Auto Filter on breakdown, "tons" of compression (Carlsson).

Tuning: Dropped-D.

Creative Concept: "We wanted our parts to mirror the dark mood of the lyrics," says Carlsson. "There are two guitar tracks—I played one and Todd played the other. In the verses, our picking patterns are the same. He plays in a low register, and I play an octave above him—except that I add a harmony on the top two notes of the line. Then, on the second half of the verse, I start playing this real ethereal harmonic part that flows in and out of the background. That approach was inspired by jazz improvisation. I mean, what's the point of two guitar players in a band doubling each other all the time? I wanted to create some subtle, but lush harmonic interest."

"For the chorus, we didn't go for that typical chugging barre-chord thing, either," says Deguchi. "We wanted something that was hard, but that also changed melodic patterns to give Jim [Korthe, vocalist] more to work with."

"We tuned to dropped-D, so when we barred the low strings, it allowed us to easily add a 9th on the fourth string," explains Carlsson. "That flavored the chords with some ambiguity, and it made the progression sound cooler."

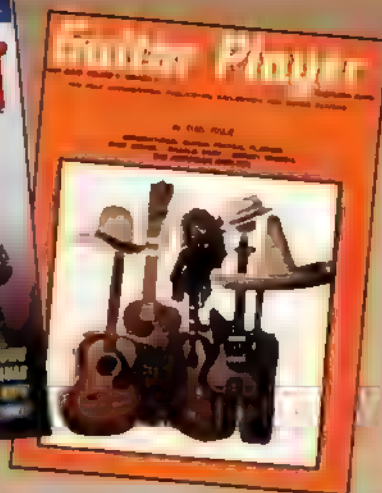
"You know, you can get really deep about stuff—and play with a bunch of effects and everything—but there's still nothing better than a simple, pounding riff to drive a song," says Deguchi. "I think our parts on 'No Light' are a good balance of heaviness, technique, and empathy for the song and the singer."

—MICHAEL ANDERSON

FRETWIRE

ders, the label—a joint venture with Columbia Records—will open offices in Los Angeles and Nashville. DMZ's first release is a self-titled album from **Ralph Stanley**, who took home a Grammy for his work on the *O Brother* soundtrack. On the other end of the spectrum, Vans—maker of the classic skateboarding shoe—is also starting a label. **Vans Records** will be headed by Pennywise frontman, **Jim Lindberg**. Though no bands have been signed as of press time, the roster will most likely appeal to those involved in skateboard culture, as epitomized by the long-running **Vans Warped Tour**. Check out vans.com for more info. . . .

MEGADETH NO MORE: In April, **Dave Mustaine** announced the disbanding of **Megadeth**, due to a serious injury to his left arm and hand. According to mtv.com, Mustaine relapsed in January after a decade of sobriety, and subsequently checked into a Texas rehab, where the accident occurred. Although the events leading to the injury have not been disclosed, Mustaine revealed via a press release that he suffers from radial neuropathy—a compressed radial nerve. Physicians aren't sure whether the damage will heal completely, but say if it does, it will take approximately a year. As for the future, Mustaine said: "For the time being, I have decided to exit Megadeth, and explore other areas of the music business where I might be able to make a contribution without being able to play my instrument. I am working hard with a great team of doctors and physical therapists, and, God willing, someday I hope to play guitar again."—EMILY FASTEN



MY FAVORITE GUITAR PLAYER Billy Gibbons



"BILLY F. GIBBONS SAYS do not miss the January 2002 issue. Why? Because this is the one that dramatizes the best of the best. Whether you're a thrash 'n' bash metalhead or a smooth 'n' groove, slide 'n' slither professional, this issue will be bring you back to square one, and then send you beyond the planets. There are some serious moments to behold, and some serious moments yet to hold.

"And for the truly adventuresome .6-string fanatics, do whatever it takes to snag the very first issue (Volume I, Number I, 1967). I've got every single issue of *GP*, but when I saw that first one on the newsstand, it was the most unexpected spotlight on that which we all love the most—the guitar. What we enjoy now is many years of focus on our most prized plank. Read on, *mi amigos*, and play them blues!"

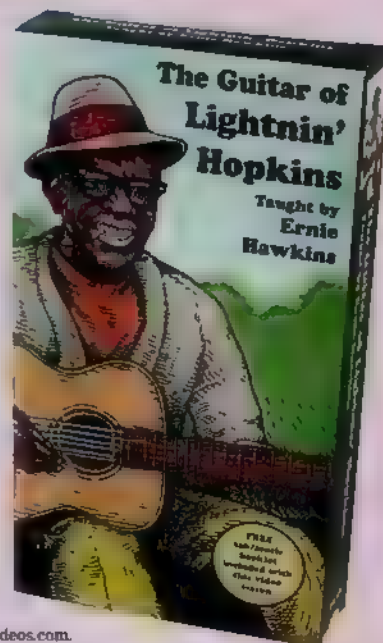
—BILLY GIBBONS, APRIL, 2002

LEARNING CURVE

The Guitar of Lightnin' Hopkins

Considering blues legend Lightnin' Hopkins' sparse style, anyone wanting to learn his tunes may think a simple songbook sufficient. But slap *The Guitar of Lightnin' Hopkins* into your VCR, and it will be immediately apparent the master's style is packed with subtleties that sheet music can't elucidate. In fact, Hopkins' music is so timeless and heavy because of his quirks and elusive groove.

This is where roots-guru Ernie Hawkins comes in. Hawkins—who studied with blues godfathers Rev. Gary Davis, Son House, and Mississippi Fred McDowell—not only delivers the skinny on how to play five Hopkins' classics ("Pull a Party," "Goin' Down Slow," "Shining Moon," "Baby Please Don't Go," and "Take Me Back"), he also decodes the Texas blues king's turnarounds and licks, as well as his unorthodox timing. Hawkins' delivery may feel a little dry and impersonal, but you can't fault his knowledge and thoroughness. The video includes live footage of Hopkins' grooving onstage in the '50s and '60s, and you also get a songbook that provides tablature and standard notation of all the songs and major points Hawkins covers on screen. —SHAWN HAMMOND



Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop, Box 802, Sparta, NJ 07871; (201) 729-5544. guitarvideos.com.

SONGCRAFT Neil Finn

Neal Finn's achingly beautiful melodies, quirky soundscapes, and evocative singing voice coalesce to make him one of rock's most cinematic songwriters. In 1979, while a member of New Zealand new wavers Split Enz, he wrote "I Got You," one of the catchiest tunes ever to blast out of a radio. For his next venture, Crowded House, Finn's creative muse unleashed international megahits such as "Don't Dream It's Over" and "Something So Strong," as well as 1991's *Woodface*—an almost perfect blend of songcraft, audio production, and expressive performances.

Now a solo artist, Finn's latest release, *One All (Network America)*, is melodically deep and sonically experimental without being the least bit inaccessible. His ongoing love affair with guitarcraft (his main guitars are a '58 Gretsch Firebird and a '68 Gibson goldtop Les Paul) also proclaims that Finn is a songwriter who understands the power of sound.

MICHAEL MOLENDRA

• • • • •

"When I'm writing, I try to capture the essence of a song's rhythm—as well as the richness of the chords I have in my head—but I don't conceptualize my approach to the work as a guitar player," says Finn. "In other words, I don't sit down and say something like, 'This song would work best with a scratchy, funky guitar part.' I just play along and see what happens, because I'm not interested in being predictable. My songs are often traditional and melodic, anyway, and I'm never satisfied with a song unless it goes somewhere unexpected."

"This is where the studio becomes so important, because a song isn't really known

until it's recorded. Unfortunately, a lot of record making these days is about defining what a song should sound like when it's finished. It's all paint-by-the-numbers, and that approach can produce extremely sterile songs. I believe it's best to make music that feels good as you're doing it right now

Every song should be a little mysterious before you record it, so that there's a chance you'll fumble into something startling and unlikely. I'm always looking for a magical surprise in the studio.

"Another way to avoid making generic music is to not study your influences too

well. If you slave over learning someone else's parts, you run the risk of losing your own personality in the process. Whereas, if you haven't mastered every lick, riff, and solo, then you have this wonderful capacity to constantly get it all wrong in a really beautiful way."

"The most adventurous song production right now is in hip-hop," says Finn. "Those guys are totally in control of their medium, but they let themselves discover the music; I can imagine them in the studio getting whacked out and just having a great time."





**THE ARTIST FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE FRUSTRATED GUY WHO
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New Gear

By Emily Fasten



KUSTOM

Kustom has updated the look of its K2 line of acoustic amplifiers with brown Tolex covers, brown woven grille cloth, leather handles, and a wood control panels. The KAA 30 TH (\$277) features 30 watts, a 10" Celestion speaker, spring reverb, and an analog chorus. The KAA65 TH (\$379.95, pictured) offers 65 watts, a 12" Celestion, active and passive inputs, a mic input, and eight 24-bit digital effects. Kustom, 4940 Delhi Pike, Cincinnati, OH 45238; (513) 451-5000; kustom.com.

1. VOX

When Vox unveiled the first wah-wah pedal in the '60s, it was an effort to emulate the sound of a muted trumpet, so it made sense to recruit trumpeter Clyde McCoy as an endorser. In commemoration of the device that changed music forever, Vox has updated and reissued the Clyde McCoy Wah pedal (\$250). Like the original, the circuit is based on a custom-tuned inductor made by Fasel, and the pedal features a sketch of McCoy on the bottom plate. Updates include true-bypass switching, a custom-taper potentiometer, an AC adapter jack, a gray Ham-

metone finish, and a vinyl carrying case. Vox, 316 South Service Road, Melville, NY 11747; (516) 333-9100; vox.co.uk.

2. DIGITECH

DigiTech's ten new stompboxes (\$119-\$144) all use the company's AudioDNA technology. The Metal Master (pictured), Hot Rod, and Tone Driver distortion pedals feature both normal and cabinet-modeling outputs,

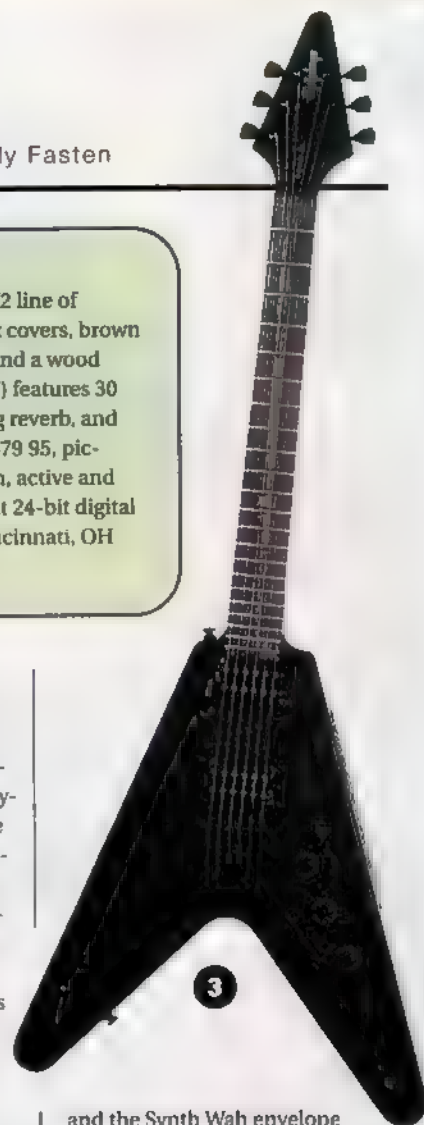


as well as a Warp knob for mixing two different models. The 16-voice Multi-Chorus has stereo outputs and a variable voice control, and the Hyper Phase and Turbo Flange

each have seven operation modes that include voicing, triggering, and step functions. The DigiDelay offers four seconds of delay time, tap tempo,

ping-pong, and tape delay, and the DigiReverb has a selection of springs, plates, rooms, and

halls. The Main Squeeze compressor/sustainer features dbx OverEasy compression,



and the Synth Wah envelope filter has DigiTech's exclusive "vowel-select" capability. DigiTech, dist. by Harman Music Group, 8760 S. Sandy Parkway, Sandy, UT 84070; (801) 566-8800, digitech.com.

3. EPIPHONE

The new Goth series drapes the Les Paul Studio (\$659), Flying V (\$699, pictured), Explorer (\$699), and SG models (\$599) in vampire-approved black (including all hardware). Each guitar features two open-coil humbuckers, a mahogany body and neck, and an ebony fretboard. The Les Paul Studio adds an alder top. Epiphone, dist. by Gibson, 645 Massman Dr., Nashville, TN 37210, (615) 871-4500; epiphone.com.



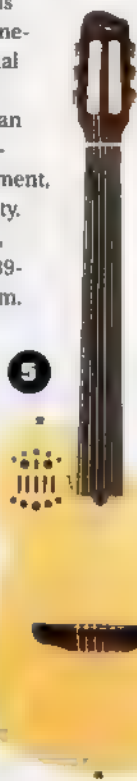


4. MORLEY

The CLW Classic Wah (\$119) features Morely's Electro-Optical circuitry—which is completely devoid of mechanical pots. The pedal comes in a heavy-duty metal chassis and has an LED indicator, an easy-open battery compartment, and a two-year warranty. **Morley**, 185 Detroit St., Cary, IL 60013; (847) 639-4646; morleypedals.com.

5. GODIN

The Multiac Fretless guitar (\$1,474 with semi-gloss finish; \$1,574 with high-gloss) pairs nylon strings with a mahogany neck, a fretless ebony fingerboard, a solid spruce top, and a chambered mahogany body. It features custom RMC electronics with a 13-pin connector for use with a guitar synth. A hardshell



case is included. **Godin**, 19420 Avenue Clark Graham, Baie D'Urfe, Quebec, Canada H9X 3R8; (514) 457-7977; godinguitars.com.

6. D'AQUISTO

The Tony Rice Artist Series guitar strings (\$8.95) are made of nickel-plated steel, and are the same strings that Rice uses onstage and in the studio. They feature "perma-loc" ball ends to prevent shppage, and come gauged .013, .017, .026w, .035w, .045w, and .057w. **D'Aquisto Strings**, Box 569, Deer Park, NY 11729; (631) 586-4426; daquisito.com.

7. BRIAN MOORE

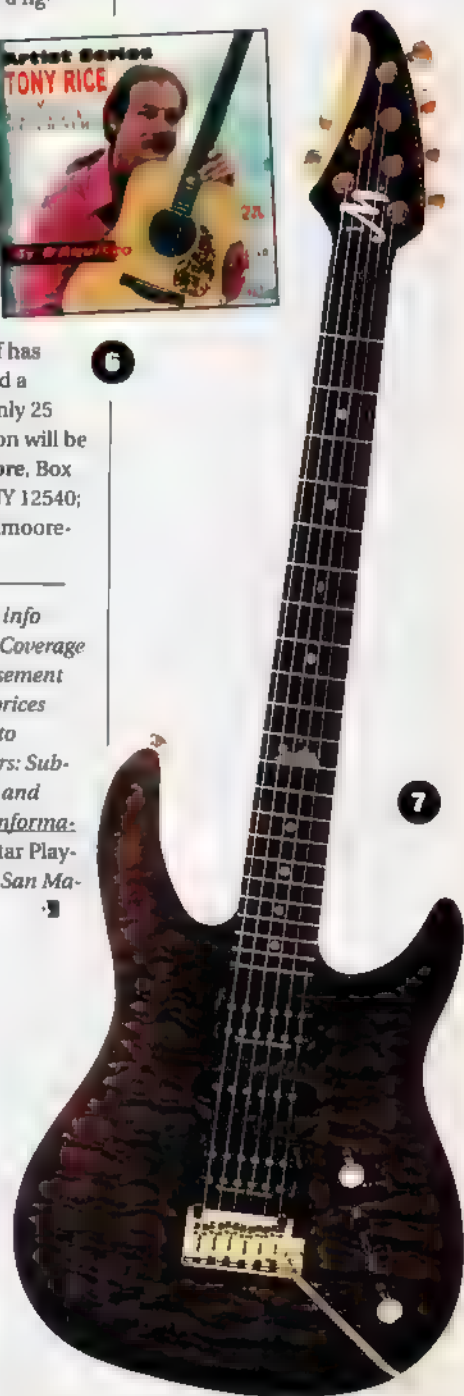
The limited-edition Mountain Inlay models (\$1,495) from the i2000 line include the i9 Chocolate (pictured) and the i9f Blue Mountain, which feature a 12th-fret inlay

of abalone, nickel-silver, and ivory. They also offer a figured-maple top, a rosewood fretboard, and Seymour Duncan pickups (an Alnico II in the neck and middle positions, and a JB in the bridge position). The i9 comes with gold hardware, and the i9f has chrome hardware and a Floyd Rose bridge. Only 25 models of each version will be produced. **Brian Moore**, Box 540, LaGrangeville, NY 12540; (845) 486-0744; brianmoore-guitars.com.

New Gear is based on info from manufacturers. Coverage does not imply endorsement by Guitar Player. All prices and specs are subject to change. Manufacturers: Submit your press release and photo with list price information to New Gear, Guitar Player, 2800 Campus Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403.

L.R. BAGGS

The iBeam Onboard System (\$259) pairs an acoustic-guitar preamp with a bridge plate transducer. The electronics incorporate the company's Para DI circuitry and Garrett Null feedback control. The preamp can be affixed with a Phillips-head screwdriver. **L.R. Baggs**, 483 North Frontage Rd., Nipomo, CA 93444; (805) 929-3545; lrbaggs.com.



SPOT INC.

The Spot String Changing Kit (\$74) comes in walnut, cherry, maple, or mahogany, with walnut inlay (except the walnut Spot, which comes with maple inlay). The kit features a magnetic closure system, and includes diagonal cutting pliers, an A-440 tuning fork, a hollow screwdriver handle that stores four interchangeable bits, a string winder with a built-in bridge-pin remover, and a stainless-steel box for pick storage. A custom nameplate is engraved free of charge. **Spot Inc.**, 90 Rankin St. Unit 28, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2V 2B3; (519) 880-9294; spotmusicbox.com.



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"This is one fine amp. I also own a Line 6 Plexone 2x12 and the Carvin SX-50 actually sounds better than the expensive Line 6 in many respects. Hendrix, Lynch, SRV—yeah its in there! The best purchase I ever made for \$300 bucks!" — CHRIS MANNING

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Trey Anastasio

Mashed-Potato Mountains

By Andy Ellis

W feel like Richard Dreyfuss' character in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*," laughs Trey Anastasio, the fleet-fingered guitarist for the world's premier jam band, Phish. "He had this mountain in his head, and he had to manifest it somehow, whether using mashed potatoes or mud. That's *exactly* what it was like making my solo record.

"I write music compulsively," admits Anastasio. "It's to the point where I have to stop myself in order to have a life."

Trey Anastasio

For five or six years, I imagined a horn-driven ensemble conceptually based on interlocking African rhythms, yet with the timbral colors of a big band and the energy of rock. I was *obsessed* with this concept, and now it's finally done."

The guitarist's mashed-potato mountain is *Trey Anastasio* (Elektra)—an album of intense improvisations and exquisitely crafted horn and orchestral arrangements. In several songs, the strands of burning extemporization and precise composition are so tightly woven that it's nearly impossible to discern how the music was

captured in the studio.

"My goal was to erase the line between improvisation and studied composition," says Anastasio. "In that regard, 'Last Tube' is the most successful song on the album. Some of the musicians worked from charts, others played lines I sang to them, and some just improvised. The basic track was a jam that I wanted to cook for 11 minutes without ever getting self-indulgent, boring, or repetitive. Then there's a 17-piece orchestra playing intricate parts over a relentless drum and bass groove, and horns that play off the guitar. I wrote the orchestration to fit my guitar solo *after* I recorded it. To do an album like

this, you have to be ready at any point to speak the language of whoever comes in—which means knowing how to write charts, or sing parts to musicians who play by ear, or coax dramatic performances from improvisers. Now I can see why it's important to learn these different skills at a young age."

Anastasio recorded his nine-piece band (guitar, bass, drums, organ, trumpet, alto and tenor sax, trombone, and percussion), a string quartet, and a full orchestra in his Vermont studio, The Barn. "I've got a 70-input API board and a big space—which is essential for recording an orchestra," he says. "We tracked to 2" tape, and used Pro Tools for overdubs. 'Alive Again' and 'Flock of Words' were recorded live, and 'Push on 'Til the Day' was done in one take. 'Night Speaks to a Woman' is live, but I doubled the guitar. 'Money, Love and Change' is more of a studio thing. The jam in the beginning is *really* live—from a show at the Greek Theater in Berkeley, California—but then we started screwing around by adding parts. 'Cayman Review' is one live take, except for an overdubbed guitar intro. For that, I used a white Strat going through a little transistor Kalamazoo amp. I have some guilt associated with that Strat because a promoter sent it backstage at a Phish show and asked us to sign it for an auction. But I kept it because I liked it so much."

On "Night Speaks to a Woman," Anastasio used the "nicked" Strat, and tracked the raunchy tones through two cranked amps: the Kalamazoo and a brown Fender Deluxe. The acoustic on "At the Gazebo" and "Ray Dawn Balloon" is a Martin D-45. For all other songs, Anastasio relied on his trademark custom Languedoc archtop (equipped with Schaller humbuckers and strung with D'Addario .010s).

"That's my baby—no change there," he says. "But I've switched amps. I've been touring with Deluxes for years, but 98 percent of the album was tracked with the Mesa/Boogie Mark III I played in the early days of Phish. And as a tribute to Lowell George, I ran through a Leslie."

But as far as Anastasio developed through the experience of making his solo album, it was startling for him to see his limitations come into clearer focus. "As I get closer to the sound that's obsessing me, I see I'm really ten steps further away from it," he admits. "For example, working with horns showed me how deep Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Benny Goodman really are. This also applies to guitar. Think you're starting to get a handle on some Jimi Hendrix licks? Well, if you really get good, then you'll conclude that no one is worthy of carrying his guitar case. I'm convinced he was a gaping hole into some other dimension. When a Hendrix song ends, it sounds like all the demons are being sucked back into his chest—*schuutt*. Now *that's* mind-altering music."

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POWER

Photography by Andrew MacNaughtan



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TECHNOLOGY OF TONE

"As a little kid, I sang a lot," says Douglas. "But I quit singing the moment I started playing Dobro. It became my voice."

Jerry Douglas

A Session Ace Goes Solo

By Andy Ellis

W just turned down a record date with Lynyrd Skynyrd," sighs Nashville's first-call Dobroist, Jerry Douglas. "It freaks me out to say 'no,' but if I want to have a solo career, I can't be perceived as a session guy who jumps at everything that's thrown at him. That's what I've always done, but now when I dish out my licks, they'll go on *my* albums."

Douglas' commitment to his own music will come as a shock to dozens of artists and producers who summon him whenever they crave the swooping holler of a squareneck resonator. But the studio world's loss is the guitar community's gain, as Douglas' new

solo album, *Lookout for Hope* (Sugar Hill), reveals the extraordinary musicality and technical finesse that has made the 46-year-old Ohio native the best-known Dobro picker in the history of the instrument. From pensive lap-slide solos to bluegrass barnburners to telepathic ensemble improvisations, Douglas' music is evocative, eclectic, and richly detailed.

The CD's ten-minute title cut—a Bill Frisell composition—features Trey Anastasio and flatpicking phenom Bryan Sutton, as well as the dueling mandolins of Sam Bush and Chris Thile. "Bill taught me 'Lookout for Hope' when Victor Krauss and I backed him

on his Nashville tour," explains Douglas. "The tune is dissonant, yet it all makes sense. That's Bill—you can hear the melody in everything he plays, but it's so *wrong*. He's one of the coolest musicians I've heard in the last ten years. I wanted to record my version without drums, so I asked Sam and Chris to play percussively. I panned them left and right, and they became the 'drum kit.' Then I sent a stereo mix to Trey on a Tascam DA-88 tape and said, 'You've got six tracks. I want your first impression, then go inside the music and figure out some parts.' He came up with some amazing stuff—patterns and countermelodies that sounded like

The 22 year Groove

Hard to believe, but 22 years of Groove Tubes are now behind us. I thank each of you who've supported us. We all share a common blessing: those pesky musician's ears. We know when it's right, and suffer when it's wrong. It's been my heart's desire as a guitarist to seek great tone. Without these ears, and the grace of God, I would not be writing this letter to share a few stories from our past.



Summer of 1979:

Groove Tubes is born

I was shootin' pool and talkin' tone with my pal, Jaco Pastorius. I had just invented a way to measure and match power tubes to make the amp more musical. Our matched tubes sustained longer, had better balance, and could be distortion rated from #1 (early distortion, softer compression) to #10 (late distortion, more dynamic). We could hear the difference, and I knew I had a company, but was stuck on the name. Jaco suggested we write down every name that came to mind. Hours later, out came "Groove Tubes," and the 20 year adventure had begun. Today, Groove Tubes is the world's leading brand and are sold around the world. We are also honored that amp makers like Fender, Ampeg, Soldano and many others choose our tubes. Jaco, if you're reading this in heaven, thanks.

Spring 1992: The Soul-o amps

Red Rhodes and I developed our Soul-o series amps out of our D75 tube amp and T10 tube preamp, adding more innovations: power stage switching from Class A/B to Class A; Clean and Scream channels could be played together; a parallel FX loop with mix control; shock mounted tubes and chassis for clarity at higher volumes; and a rack space to hold an FX unit. Red died in 1995, but GT Custom Shop still builds our Soul-o amps, and Red's still smilin' some where up in heaven.



Spring 2002:

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After 22 years of divine inspiration, I doubt He'll let us down now. If you will continue to lend us your ears, and honor us with your business, I'll keep trying to make a difference you can hear.

Thanks again and God Bless you all,

—Aspen

Aspen Pittman

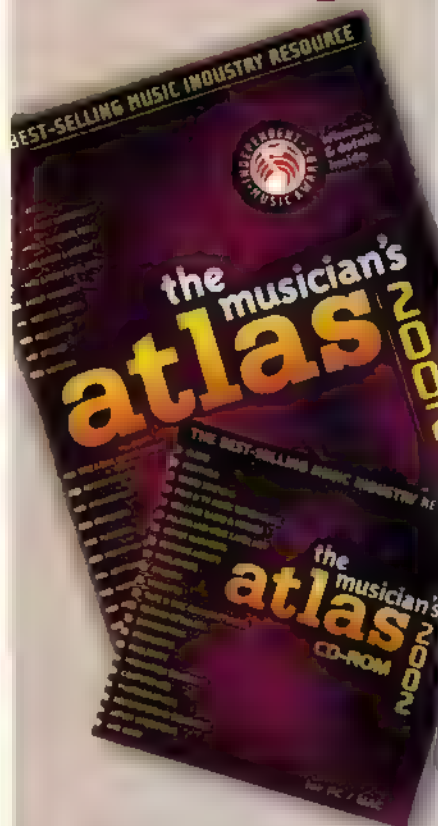
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Jerry Douglas

sequenced keyboard parts—but he'd played them all on acoustic guitar. We chopped up his lines and ran them through a Leslie cabinet to get a B3 sound. It ended up sounding like a John Scofield tune!"

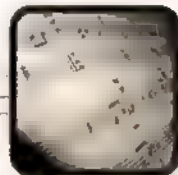
Douglas used a bevy of instruments on *Lookout for Hope*, including three Scheerhorn resonator models (an L-body, a Regal body, and a Headless), his signature model Gibson JD Dobro, a vintage Kona lap-slide guitar, and a squareneck Telecaster lap steel made by Fred Stuart of the Fender Custom Shop.

"I like to cast my guitars," says Douglas. "For Duane Allman's 'Little Martha,' I laid down the basic bed on the Gibson JD tuned to open D [D, A, D, F#, A, D, low to high]. Then I tried different guitars to see which one would sound best soloing against the main track. I settled on the L-body Scheerhorn, tuned to open G [G, B, D, G, B, D]. It has a crisp, sparkling high end, which sits nicely over the Dobro's midrange."

Listening to the sweet cry of the resonators in *Lookout for Hope*, you'd never guess that Douglas once struggled to produce great tones in the studio. "When I came to Nashville in late '78, most engineers didn't know how to record a Dobro," he says. "They'd just set up a mic and hope for the best. At that point, it was a novelty instrument—something thin and whiney that producers used to label a track as a country song. But I was playing Dobro differently from the guys they'd recorded before. I approached it as a lead instrument, and engineers had to learn to dig out the sound. Eventually, they found the sweet spot: It's on the treble-string side, right between the screen and the coverplate."

Douglas likes to record his Dobro with either a Neumann U49 or U50 large-diaphragm condenser positioned about five inches above the body. "From there, I'm able to mix my own tone right to tape," he says. "The low end comes through the small, screen-covered holes, and the upper-mids and highs rise from the cone through the coverplate. So, if I want my lines to sink back into the track—but still have some cut—I'll lean left to bring the coverplate under the mic. But on a slower song, where a fat tone can really shine, I'll lean right to accentuate the bass. To get a huge, unmistakable Dobro sound, I'll put a second mic over my left shoulder—so it hears what I'm hearing—and I'll blend that sound with the close mic."

For would-be Dobroists, Douglas offers these clues: "Listen to Josh Graves with Flatt and Scruggs—he's my foundation. His bluesy touch sets him apart from all the early Dobro players. And also check out Mike Auldridge, who made his name with the Seldom Scene, a Washington, D.C., bluegrass band. He played Byrds and Beatles songs on the Dobro, and that was a revelation."



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FRANK CARILLO

Profile: Soloist, sideman, writer, session veteran, producer. Frank's resume would make any guitarist envious - it includes work with Peter Dinklage, Joan Jett, Golden Earring and others. You can catch Frank on tour with John Hammond's Wicked Grin.

Amp of Choice: "My Laney VC30. I had a favorite amp that I used for years, but the VC30 retired it. Nothing I've ever played is as gritty and soulful. It brings out the best in my playing and people notice."



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"I try to look at the neck like a piano, where you have access to all these huge jumps," says Eklundh. "Melodies are nothing but intervals anyway, but I try to avoid the obvious ones."

Mattias Eklundh

Hardware Wars

By Matt Blackett

W never sent my music to Favored Nations," says Swedish shred-freak Mattias "IA" Eklundh. "But one day I got an e-mail from Steve Vai saying he had heard my stuff and liked it. I thought it was a bad joke, but once I realized it was for real, I was amazed. There are millions of great guitarists out there, yet he chose me. It's far beyond flattering."

What Vai heard was a dizzying display of chops, weird noises, and a healthy dose of humor—elements that are all over Eklundh's CD, *Freak Guitar* [Favored Nations].

The chops come from intense woodshedding by Eklundh, who took up drums at six and guitar when he was 13. The weird noises are generated by vibrators, hose clamps, remote control devices, and the coolest use of harmonics in a long time. As for the humor, it permeates every track on *Freak Guitar*—from a turbo-charged cover of "La Bamba" to a gypsy-jazz rendition of Kiss' "Detroit Rock City."

An Eklundh trademark is his use of huge interval skips—skips so wide that it's easy to assume they were created electronically.

They weren't. "I get e-mails all the time asking about my Whammy pedal," he laughs. "Almost all those strange sounds you hear are done with harmonics."

Eklundh's claim is hard to believe—especially when you listen to the stratospheric glisses in the melody to "Apparatus" and hear notes that are clearly out of the guitar's natural range. "I'm hitting a high-A harmonic on the 14th fret of the G string," he explains, "and I'm also using the 22nd, 17th, and 5th fret harmonics on the high-E string, mixed in with all the fretted notes."

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Mattias Eklundh

This is all the *more* amazing when you consider that Eklundh doesn't use a pick or strumming-hand finger to pluck the harmonics. "I just slap my left-hand finger on the string while I'm playing the melody," he says. "I don't pick the harmonics at all. I find that sound to be ugly. I just lower the whammy bar and touch the string, and as I raise the bar, the harmonics jump out. I got into this when I was learning how to play because I couldn't afford fancy effects—I had to use my imagination."

When he can't express himself with fretted notes and harmonics, Eklundh uses whatever is at hand to get his point across. For the creepy noises in "Lisa's Passion for Heavy Metal," he used a hose clip he has owned since he was 15. "It's just a cheap metal clamp that you can get in any hardware store," he says. "I wear it on my right-hand index finger, and I can make great, ugly noises by playing over the pickups with it. For the machine gun blasts in 'Apparatus,' I ran my guitar through a distorted amp and pointed the infrared signal of a Pioneer remote control at the pickups. Sometimes, I'll also put a variable speed vibrator through my gear."

Although he is obviously open to experimentation, Eklundh keeps his "normal" equipment fairly minimal, playing his signature model Ca-

parison guitars exclusively. "It's a small, but growing Japanese company, and they make excellent guitars," he says. "Mine has 27 frets, one humbucker, and one single-coil. The single volume knob is a push-pull pot, and that's how you change pickups. My amp rig is a Laney VH 100R head and a Laney 4x12 cab."

Eklundh's shenanigans and bizarre sounds add a funny, madcap component to *Freak Guitar*, setting him apart from many shred-meisters whose maniacal pursuit of technique often robs them of humor. His wit—combined with his super-human command of the instrument and some very *Flex-able*-esque arrangements—have even drawn comparisons to his boss, Mr. Vai.

"In the beginning, I was told I sounded too much like Steve," he admits. "But I like to think I got a little of my own strange Swedish voice in there." Eklundh also cites Kiss, Frank Zappa, John McLaughlin, Tiny Tim, and Van Halen as formative influences.

When he's not recording his "cheesy little songs," Eklundh keeps busy by teaching, doing clinics, playing with his band Freak Kitchen, and gigging in Scandinavia, France, and Japan. "I've been surviving by bending strings and playing with vibrators and hose clips since I was 19," he says. "You have to be a fanatic to do this, and I am. The world of guitar is just a big playground for me."

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"When we got off stage after playing at a club's mod night, some girl sneered, 'Well, we don't need another Who,'" says James (left, Tyler is second from right). "But the reason I started a band is because I do need another Who!"



The Mooney Suzuki

Sammy James, Jr. & Graham Tyler Rev Up

By Michael Molenda

The Mooney Suzuki's aptly titled *Electric Sweat* (Gammon) evokes a time when brutalized guitars and overcranked amps were tortured by studio processing until the melange sounded like a joyful revolution of chaos and cunning. The record's lineage can be traced to Shel Talmy's feral '60s productions of the Who and the Kinks, but surmising that the Mooney sound is all about abusing gear is missing the point. *Electric Sweat* is certainly enhanced by vintage mics and compressors,

but the heart of the album is four guys in a room, fearlessly bashing out one-take tracks and falling all over themselves to have a blast and get it all *wrong*.

"We're into momentum," says rhythm guitarist/vocalist Sammy James, Jr. "Energy is always more important to us than actual notes. Even Jimi Hendrix—who certainly had what people call 'sick chops'—would sometimes be more about attitude, feel, sound, and color than technique. In fact, while making *Electric Sweat*, we'd re-record a solo if

there weren't enough wrong notes in it."

"The key to what we do is playing less, but meaning more," adds lead guitarist Graham Tyler. "For example, Lou Reed can play one note over and over, but the way he plays that one note is thrilling. That's something that can't be taught, because it's about being able to project what's inside of you. It's that intangible thing that makes music so exciting."

To achieve maximum vibe, the Mooney men free their minds to seek inspiration

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The Mooney Suzuki

without reservation. James often steals riffs from favorite tunes to kick-start his songwriting process, and Tyler says his best solos are driven by "amazing accidents" when he's covered in beer, and flat on his back in a sea of people.

"My delight and frustration about my style is that it's due to a lack of chops and patience," admits Tyler. "I was a big fan of Led Zeppelin, but I couldn't deal with learning Jimmy Page's solos. That forced me to go back and see who influenced him, and I discovered Johnny Guitar Watson, Guitar Slim, and other early blues greats. Hearing the simplicity of what they played was a revelation, and very encouraging. I'd hear a three-note solo that, to me, was cooler and carried more emotion than an 800-note Frank Zappa run, and it was also something I could do."

"Now I'm at a point where I don't want to get any better. I want to remain at a child-like level of guitar playing, because I think that's where a lot of the most honest, exciting, and raw stuff comes from. I think you're taking yourself too seriously if you noodle endlessly over a chord progression looking for the perfect thing to play. You should just surrender to the fact that life, music, and art is most exciting when it's completely unpredictable. If you try to control things, music becomes stale and boring. A lot of people can play a perfect solo, but I would much rather hear the guitar being broken over someone's head."

To power his rhythm rave-ups, James plugs a '71 Fender Telecaster into a late-'60s Orange 80-watt combo. ("I actually use two combos," he says. "It's a good visual effect to have them flanking the drums, but I also need a backup because they're not very reliable on the road.") Tyler's main guitar is a '64 Epiphone Crestwood Deluxe, and his amp is a reissue Vox AC30. Both guitarists use Pyramid strings (.010 sets), and rely on a single effect. James' choice is a Fulltone Full-Drive, and Tyler's is a Roadrunner Super Sonic Fuzz.

The Mooney's reverence for honesty and exploration sometimes puts them at odds with artists who they feel misuse the power of the guitar. "I hate groups like Korn, Limp Bizkit, and Slipknot," says James. "It's like constipation music. Why bother to use a guitar if you're going to have a completely one-dimensional sound? None of their notes have any attack or sustain or decay—they're either on or off. And the guitar tone seems to be a representation of the message of the band, which is, 'I'm such a freak and you'll never understand me.' Our music is much more about believing in yourself, taking a chance on other people, and having a sense of adventure, as opposed to shutting out the world because you don't care about anything."

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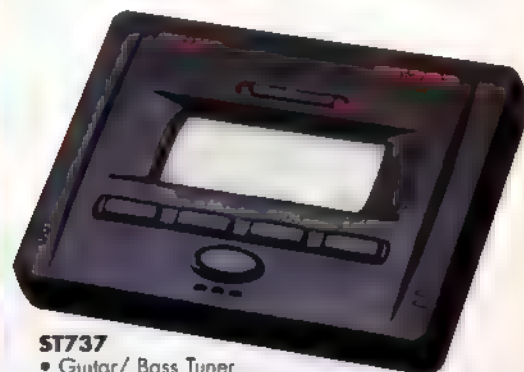
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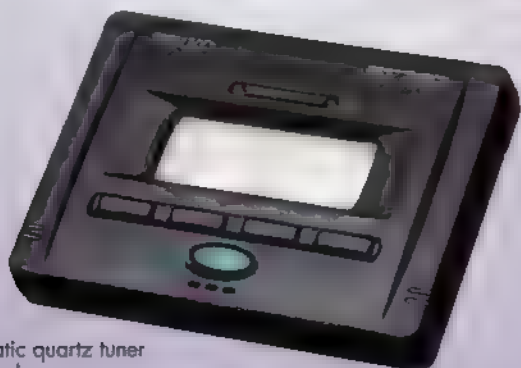
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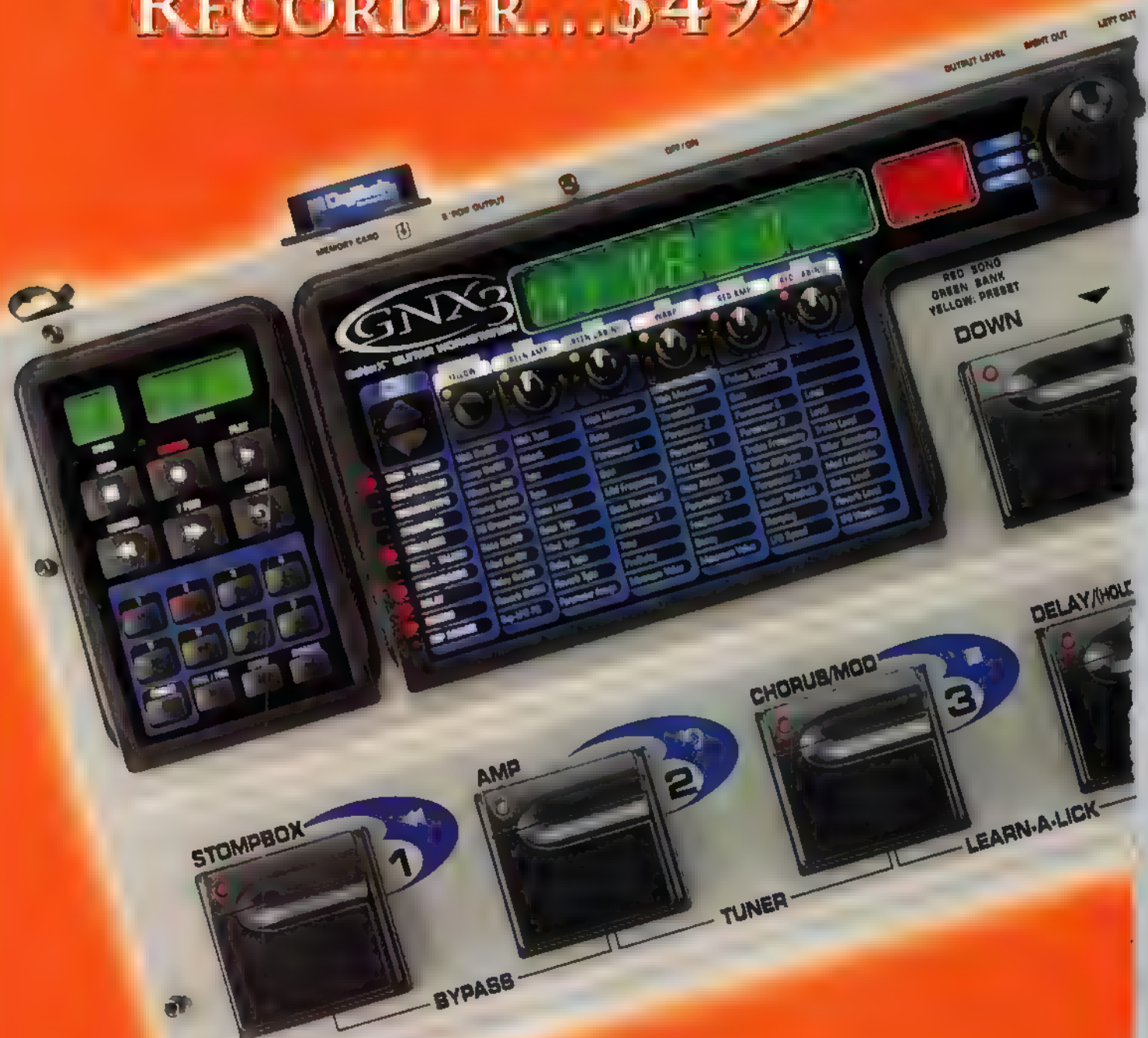
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—RIVERS CUOMO



ALT- SHRED

WEEZER'S RIVERS CUOMO SAVES THE GUITAR SOLO

BY MATT BLACKETT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARL KOCH

Each generation rebels against the one before. This was never truer than in the '90s, when alternative ~~grunge~~ ^{grunge} poster-boy Kurt Cobain and his followers gleefully pounded musical nails into the '80s metal coffin. Lo-fi, gut-level guitar playing was in, virtuosity was out. ■ Before the dust had settled from the alternative explosion, however, a band out of Los Angeles called Weezer came along to challenge the guitar anti-heroes. Mixing radically distorted guitars, catchy pop hooks, and geek-chic visuals, > > > >

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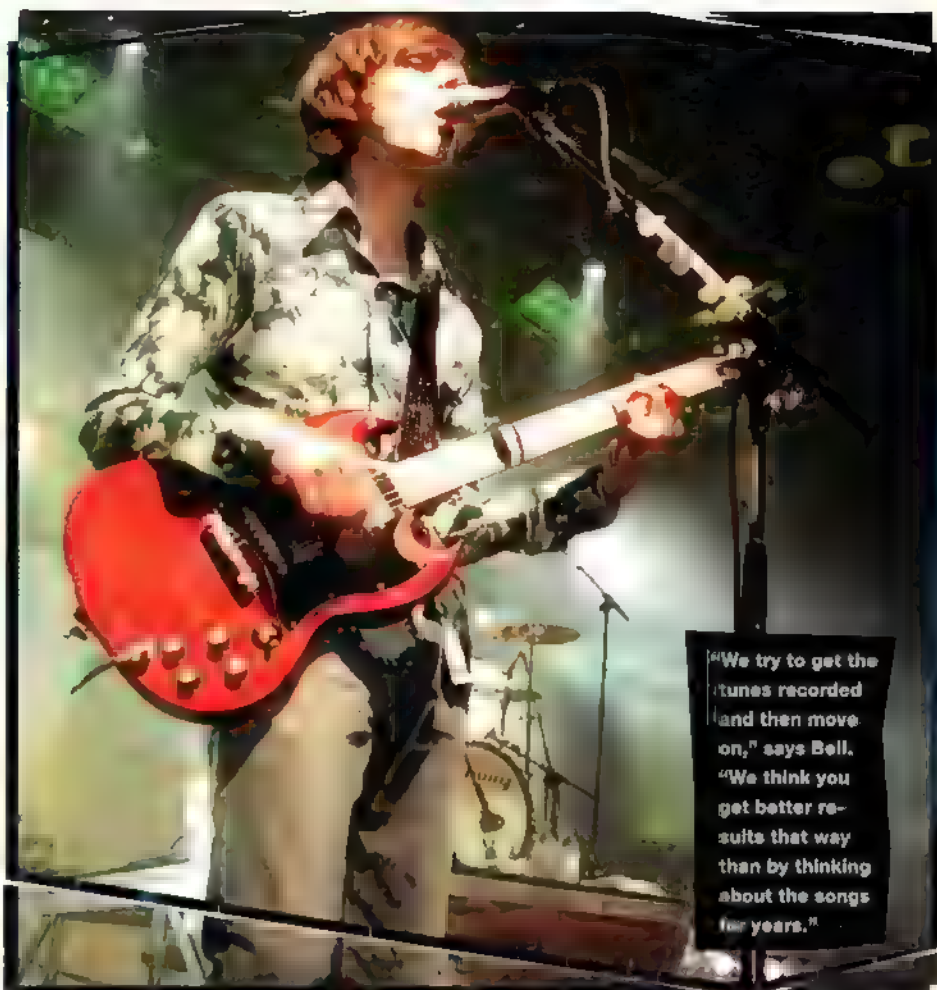
Weezer—and its leader and chief songwriter, Rivers Cuomo—became a huge part of the alt-pop revolution. But rather than deny his hard-rock roots, Cuomo displays them proudly, and he has never been afraid to break alternative music's unwritten rule against loud, prominent guitar solos.

And yet, Cuomo has never been wilder than on Weezer's current release, *Maladroit* (Geffen). The album is wall-to-wall guitar, complete with crushing rhythm lines and intricate, ferocious solos. Indeed, Cuomo might be the missing link between Judas Priest and Nirvana—a cutting edge, modern-rock icon who isn't afraid to shred and shred again.

~~~~~

*You've always played leads, but not with this kind of ferocity.*

On the previous album, I had seriously retreated from lead guitar. I was pretty much just quoting the vocal melody, and I got deluged with



"We try to get the tunes recorded and then move on," says Bell. "We think you get better results that way than by thinking about the songs for years."

## BRIAN BELL'S SENSE OF SPACE

**GUITARIST BRIAN BELL IS THE SONIC foil to Weezer leader Rivers Cuomo. Here Bell details his role in Weezer and the difference between playing with Cuomo and fronting his own band, Space Twins.**

\*\*\*\*\*

*I read that you joined Weezer three days before the sessions for the first album.*

Not exactly—the album was already in progress when I joined. They sent me a tape with my parts already mapped out, and I tracked them.

*How has your job changed over the years?*

Now I come up with my own parts, but that's true with everyone in the band. Anyone can throw ideas on the table, and we all weed through them. The basic idea is any part on any instrument should be memorable and humbly. That's our sound.

*What's the difference between your roles in Weezer and Space Twins?*

In Weezer, I focus on complementing Rivers and his melodies, whereas in Space Twins I'm the lead singer—which requires a different mindset. I play in more of a strumming style, and I let the other guitarist play off the vocal. Also, I typically get one guitar track in Weezer. In Space Twins I'll put down a bunch of tracks.

*Do you and Cuomo ever change up your roles in Weezer?*

Yeah, we're working on two new songs—"Yellow Camaro" and "Nice to Meet You"—where I sing and Rivers just concentrates on the guitar, which he really likes. We played "Yellow Camaro" live in Portugal, and we were both nervous as hell because of the role reversal. We hadn't felt that way in years.

*Pick a tune on Maladroit and describe*

*your parts.*

On "Dope Nose," I play all the little twiddly lines and the answers to the vocal during the verses. In the chorus, I do the Lynyrd Skynyrd-type noodles. I played a Gibson SG through a Marshall MKI. I like the SG. It's sort of a happy medium between a Les Paul and a Strat. It has top end, but it's still beefy. On "Death and Destruction," I used my favorite guitar—a Fender Telecaster Thinline—for the clean, chimy parts.

*Did you take any of the solos on the record?*

No. I get off on rhythm playing—that's my strong suit. Rivers takes all the solos on *Maladroit*, and he really unleashed his inner shredding beast on this album. He always had that ability, but he had been holding it back. I love to hear him play that way. I think the climate is cool for guitar heroes again.

—MB

# ALT-SHRED

criticism from our fans. As we were recording *Maladroit*, I would post mp3s of rough mixes on our Web site so fans could voice their opinions. A lot of them said, "That solo is terrible! Why aren't you shredding?" So, I'd go back into the studio the next day and just go for it. The fans seemed to like that a lot better. Looking back on it, I'm really happy to see some wicked guitar work on a modern album.

*Almost every solo is doubled. What's your process for double tracking?*

I like to go with the exact same tone for both tracks. Some producers change the guitar or the amp, but sticking with the same setup feels more realistic. It sounds like just *me*, rather than two different versions of me.

*How did you compose the solo to "Dope Nose"?*

What I did for that solo—and for a lot of my

favorite solos on the record—was sing the lines over the rhythm tracks. Then I went back and learned what I had sung. That method is becoming more and more common for me. It insures that the solo is singable and memorable, rather than just coming from the muscle memory in my fingers. I used that same technique for the leads to "American Gigolo," "Keep Fishin'," and "Take Control."

*Your solo in "Fall Together" sounds like it's doubled in the beginning, one track in the middle, and then doubled at the end.*

That's exactly what's happening, and that's the creativity of Tom Lord-Alge, who mixed the album. I just did a normal double all the way through—it was his idea to bring the double in and out. I was stoked when I heard that. I think it takes the listener on a little ride.

*You're known for taking control of things—you manage Weezer yourself and often direct the band's publicity. Did you ever disagree with Lord-Alge's approach to the mixes?*

I tried not to criticize him on the first listen. I like to sit with the mix first, rather than go with my knee-jerk reaction. For example, the first tune he mixed was "Take Control," and it was so radically different than what we had envisioned that we all panicked. I told him, "Step aside, dude. I'm mixing this one." Then I listened to both mixes 24 hours later and I realized my



CARL KOCH

In his never-ending quest to be more like the Scorpions, Cuomo burns on his Gibson Explorer.

mix was horrible and his was amazing.

*The guitar interlude in "December" is one of the nicer moments on the record. Was that written out?*

That was a total miracle. I had my solo mapped out, and Brian (Bell, Weezer co-guitarist)

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had his counterpoint line, but we had never heard each other's parts. We just mashed them together to see what would happen, and it sounded beautiful.

*How did you record the basic rhythm tracks?*

I played a stock Gibson Explorer into a new Marshall—a JCM 2000, I think. I would lay down a part with Brian, and then double it.

*The tones are huge, but defined.*

I'm not really that happy with my rhythm tones—I think they're too overdriven. Everything on my amp was on 10 and, in retrospect, I wish I would have cleaned it up a little. I think Brian's tones are better. The definition you hear is coming from him.

*What was the recording medium?*

Pro Tools.

*Maladroit doesn't have a real "Pro Tools" sound. What's the key to capturing a raw sound with a high-tech recording system?*

I think a big part of keeping the energy up

is tracking together. What you're hearing is all of us in a room jamming. We track the vocals the same way, with all three of us feeding off each other's energy and bleeding into each other's mics. When you track that way, you *can't* make the recording pristine and perfect, but the vibe is more than worth it. Also, we don't copy and paste or loop anything—which helps keep the tracks sounding raw.

*How did you get the rich clean tones on "Death and Destruction"?*

All I did was switch to the rhythm pickup on my Explorer and roll the volume back a bit. I really like the sound of that tune.

*Maladroit doesn't have many clean tones. In your mind, do they instantly make a tune wimpy?*

There are lots of great recordings where the clean tones sound really heavy. I just don't have such good instincts for crafting those tones, because that's not what I grew up listening to. I usually resort to maximum distortion and leave the clean stuff to other players.

*How does it affect you when you do use a clean tone?*

I end up getting funky, which isn't a good thing for me. I was meant to rock.

*What's your live rig these days?*

We're still going with Line 6 Pod Pros, which are dialed-in to sound like the Marshalls on the record.

*Do you even have an amp on stage?*

Now I do. For a while I didn't, and it didn't make that much difference. The amp is just sort of an emotional crutch. We got into touring with Pods when we were playing bowling alleys and places like that, and it was a lot simpler and much better for my singing, because there was no volume on stage. Now we use Pods because I think they sound better than amps—which is really sad. But, playing in arenas, there are too many variables with mic positioning and stage sound to get a consistent tone from day to day. We run the Pod Pros direct to the board, and they always sound great.

*Why didn't you use them on the recording?*

I brought it up, but the engineer instantly shot that idea down. He wanted amps.

*What are you bringing for guitars?*

I bring a lot of guitars, because I'm still trying to find the perfect one. I'm taking Explorers, Flying Vs, Strats, and Strat copies. My Strats all have Seymour Duncan TB-1 humbuckers in the bridge position.

*Is it true that you guys are nearly finished with the follow-up to Maladroit?*

That's true. We've played some of the new tunes for a while, though.

*What's the new stuff like?*

It's going to be a more personal album. The *Green Album* was very non-emotional, *Maladroit* is us starting to come out of our shell, and now we're all feeling confident, and we want to express that.

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*How does this new confidence affect you from a guitar-playing standpoint?*

I've cleaned up my sound a bit—it's punchier and has more definition. For the latest sessions, I used a plexi Marshall and spent more

time having fun with guitar tones. I'm not doubling my tracks this time, so we're all coming up with more interesting and complex parts because there's more sonic space.

*Do you remember the first solo you learned?*

I'm sure it was from a Kiss song, but I can't remember which one. Later, I spent a long time learning Yngwie stuff. When I saw an Yngwie songbook on a store shelf, I cried tears of joy, because I never could have figured those solos out otherwise.

*That's a pretty big leap, from Kiss to Yngwie. What were some of the transitional bands?*

I dug Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, George Lynch, and the Scorpions. In fact, the guitarist I hear the most in my playing is Matthias Jabs

from the Scorpions. Another huge influence was Quiet Riot. When I heard "Metal Health" on the radio for the first time, it crystallized everything for me. I thought, "Here's this new sound that belongs entirely to me and my generation. This is how I want to identify myself as a metalhead."

*You're the first guy in a long time to not only admit these things, but to wear them as a badge of honor.*

I've been saying this stuff all along, but I guess no one ever believed me. If you look at the liner notes to our first album—which came out in 1994—there is a clearly visible Quiet Riot poster

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I bet they really want to solo, but they haven't figured out their style yet. Maybe when they try to take a solo it sounds dorky to them.

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# SOLID

## AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW OF 50 YEARS OF THE GIBSON



The Les Paul turns 50 this year, making it the second oldest solidbody 6-string to still enjoy superstar status. Introduced at the dawn of rock and roll, this classic-looking instrument was a perfect weapon for players bent on bringing the

electric guitar centerstage—the most famous evangelist at the time being Les Paul. The collaboration between Gibson and Paul resulted in a signature instrument that not only helped change the face of popular music, but also spawned such important creations as the humbucking pickup, the Tune-o-mat

ic bridge, and the stop tailpiece.

To celebrate the Les Paul's 50th, here are some abbreviated sections from Tony Bacon's new 160-page tome, *50 Years of the Gibson Les Paul* (Backbeat Books). This feature focuses on the Les Paul's early development, and Bacon documents the story in glowing detail. —ART THOMPSON

### A SOLID ROAD

Ted McCarty joined Gibson in March 1948, having worked at the Wurlitzer organ company for the previous 12 years. In 1950, he was made president of Gibson when the company was finding it hard in the post-war years to get



The Les Paul goldtop featured a trapeze bridge/tailpiece when it debuted in 1952.



# GOLD

## LES PAUL BY TONY BACON

targets were to increase the effectiveness of supervision in the factories, to bolster efficiency, and to improve and widen internal communication. By 1950 Gibson's electric guitar line consisted of seven models, from the ES-125 retailing at \$97.50, through the ES-140, ES-150, ES-175, ES-300 and ES-350, up to the ES-5 at \$375. These were all archtop, hollowbody guitars of the f-holed, amplified-acoustic type.

Then along came that Fender solidbody electric from California. "We were watching what Leo Fender was doing, realizing that he was gaining popularity in the west," said McCarty. "I watched him and watched him, and said, 'We've got to get into

that business.'" McCarty's recollection was that Gibson started work on its own solidbody guitar project soon after the appearance of Fender's Broadcaster in November 1950, and that he and the company's top engineers were involved in the project.

"We designed the guitars," McCarty said emphatically. "And we started trying to learn something about a solidbody guitar. I was working with the rest of the engineers and we would sit down—like in a think tank—and say, 'Let's do this' and 'Let's try that.'"

Exactly how many people at the company were involved in the design of the new instrument—which was to become the



Les Paul and Mary Ford on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1951. Both players are holding Epiphone test-bed guitars.

# SOLID GOLD

the design of the new instrument—which was to become the Gibson Les Paul—is unclear. McCarty thought there were at least four: "Myself, plus John Huis [McCarty's vice president in charge of production], one of the fellows in charge of the wood department, and one of the guitar players in final assembly." McCarty also mentioned Gibson employees Julius Bellson and Wilbur Marker as being "in on the thing," and it's likely that Gibson's sales people were consulted at various stages through Clarence Havenga, the company's vice president in charge of sales.

"We eventually came up with a guitar that was attractive," said McCarty, "and as far as we were concerned it had the tone, it had the resonance, and it also had the sustain. As far as I can remember, to get to that point took us about a year."

An article early in 1952 in Gibson's local paper, the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, drew attention to the fact that the company had files bulging with instrument ideas that musicians had sent in. Presumably, somewhere in those files lurked Les Paul's idea for a semi-solid electric guitar—the "log" he'd brought to the company years earlier. He was turned away then. But things were changing fast.

"We thought we had our guitar," said McCarty, "and now we needed an excuse to make it. At

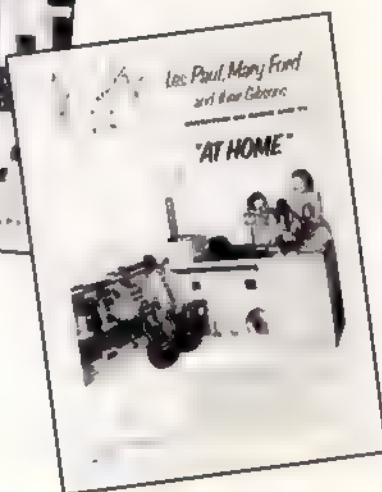
that time, Les Paul and Mary Ford were probably the number-one vocal team in the United States. And knowing Les and Mary, I decided maybe I ought to show this guitar to them."

## SOLID FACTS?

Les Paul's recollections of the events that led to Gibson pro-

ducing the Les Paul guitar are different. He said that Gibson first contacted him early in 1951, when Fender started making early examples of its solidbody electric. He remembered that Maurice Berlin—the boss of Gibson's parent company CMI—told his second-in-command Marc Carlucci to get in touch with "the fellow with the strange log guitar" whom they'd seen briefly in the 1940s.

"They said to find that guy with the broomstick with the pickups on it," Paul laughed. "They came around right away—





as soon as they heard what Fender was doing. And I said, 'You guys are a little bit behind the times, but, okay, let's go.'

Paul has said that after Gibson contacted him in 1951 about their interest in developing a solidbody electric, a meeting was set up at CMI headquarters in Chicago. Present were Berlin, Carlucci and CMI's attorney, Marv Henrickson (who also represented Paul). "They finalized their deal," Paul said, "and hammered out the specifics of the new guitar's design. Then, the research and development began in earnest."

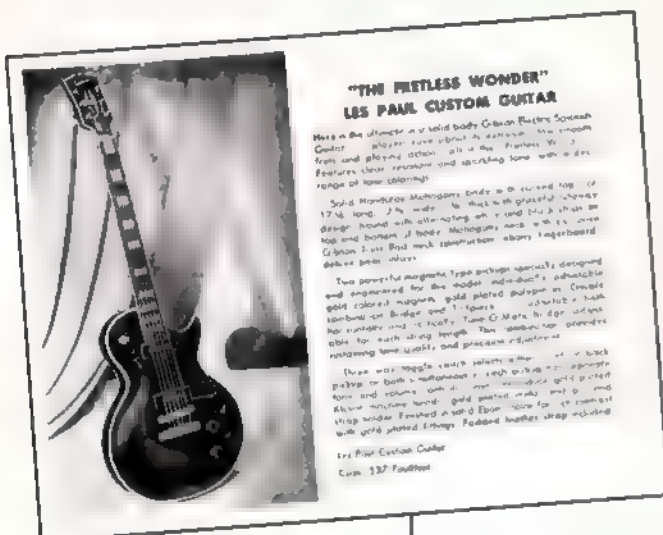
Accompanied by Paul's business manager, Phil Braunstein, McCarty took the first prototype of the Gibson Les Paul to Paul and Ford at a hunting lodge in

Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1951 or early 1952. The purpose of the visit to the lodge was to interest Paul in publicly playing the new guitar in return for a royalty on sales. Paul also recalled that the lodge was where he saw the first prototype of what became the Gibson Les Paul. McCarty remembered that Paul loved the prototype, and said to Ford, "I think we ought to join them. What do you think?" She said she liked it, too. Neither McCarty nor Paul could remember for sure, but that prototype was probably very similar to the eventual production model, except that it most likely had a normal Gibson tailpiece of the period (as on a Gibson ES-350) with a separate bridge.

According to McCarty, an

agreement was reached that very night. He, Paul, and Braunstein sat down and worked out a contract. First, they decided on the royalty Gibson would pay for every Les Paul guitar sold. Paul said it was five per cent, and the term of the contract was set at five years. "Now we had a Les Paul model," said McCarty.

Paul said that he had a much bigger involvement in the design of the Les Paul guitar than McCarty's story of the development allows. Paul states categorically: "I designed everything on there except the arched top. That was contributed by Maurice Berlin. Mr. Berlin told me he liked violins and took me by his vault to show me his collection. And he said that Gibson had something that nobody else



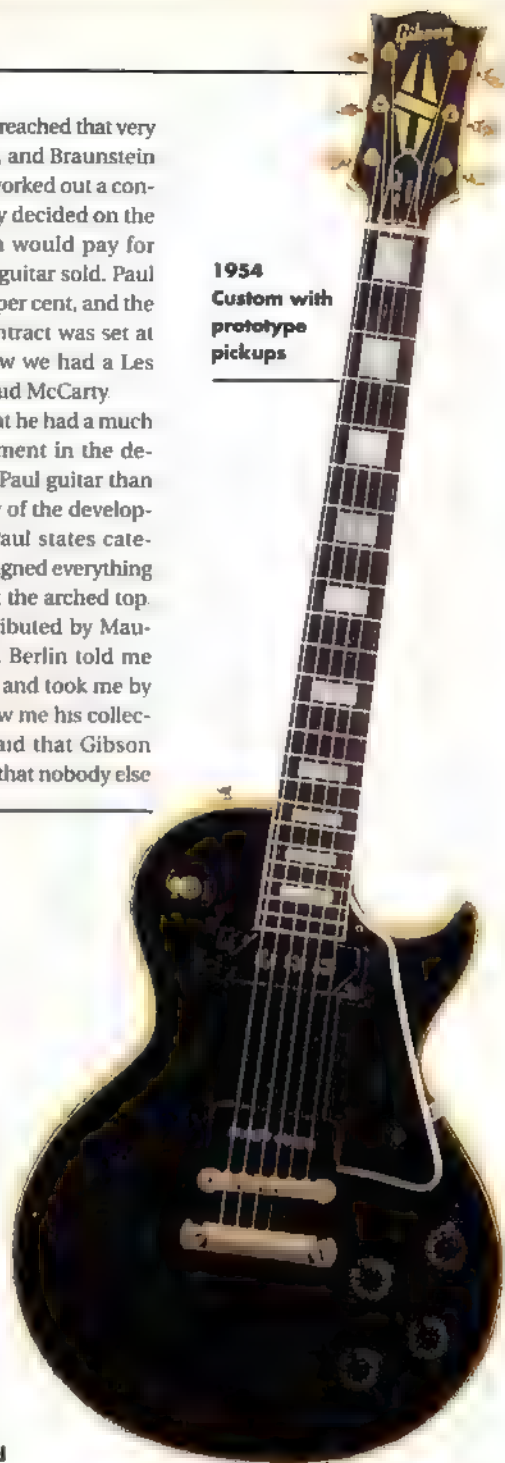
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Ex. 132 Pencil Case



**1954**  
Custom with  
prototype  
pickups

Introduced in 1954, the Custom featured an all-mahogany body and a unique neck pickup that incorporated rectangular alnico polepieces.



### Keith Richards' painted 1957 Custom

# SOLID GOLD

had, a shaper that could make a belly on that guitar, and it would be very expensive for Fender or whoever to make one like it. He asked if I'd have any objection to a violin top, and that was a wonderful idea. So then they introduced me to Ted McCarty, and we signed the agreement with Gibson."

But McCarty is adamant about the facts: "We

spent a year designing that guitar, and Les never saw it until I took it to Pennsylvania."

Looking at photographs of Paul playing Gibson Les Paul guitars in the 1950s suggests that he continued to have his own ideas about what a solid-body electric guitar should be—and those ideas were usually

contrary to Gibson's. Often his instruments were specially made with unique flat tops, where the production Les Pauls had carved tops. Paul nearly always modified his Gibsons in some way. As the diehard tinkerer said later: "By early '53, Gibson was shooting guitars to me all the time, and I was still cutting them up

and modifying the pickups, bridges, controls, and just about everything else."

Perhaps it will never be clear exactly who designed what on the original Gibson Les Paul model, but what is certain is that Paul's respected playing and commercial success, plus Gibson's weighty experience in



Keith Richards' 1959 Standard

Jimmy Page's "number one" 1958 Standard





manufacturing and marketing guitars, made for a strong and impressive combination.

## THE LES PAUL DEBUTS

The new Les Paul guitar was launched by Gibson in the summer of 1952, priced at \$210, which was about \$20 more than a Fender Telecaster. Early samples of the new guitar were shipped to Gibson's case manufacturer, Geib, at the end of April, and to Les Paul himself late in May. Some dealers began to receive stock in June. Les Paul himself began using the new Gibson solidbody immedi-

ately, and he played it onstage for the first time in June 1952 at the Paramount Theater in New York.

## DESIGN ELEMENTS

The new Les Paul's solid body cleverly combined a carved maple top bonded to a mahogany base—a sandwich that united the darker tonality of mahogany with the brighter sonic "edge" of maple. Paul said that the gold color of the original Les Paul model was his idea. "Gold means rich, expensive, superb," he said.

Unlike the prototype, the production Les Paul Model came with a new height-adjustable combined bridge-and-tailpiece. The

part where the strings made contact was bar-shaped, and joined to this were two long metal rods that went down to anchor the unit at the bottom edge of the guitar. This device was without a doubt designed by Les Paul, and was originally intended for use on archtop guitars. The earliest goldtops had a very shallow neck pitch—that is, the neck joined the body at a gentle angle. This was a mistake in the design. It meant that the strings were almost flat on to the body as they came off the neck. This precluded use of existing Gibson hardware, and so the new bridge/tailpiece was chosen as the only suitable item.

1954  
goldtop



Paul McCartney's left-handed 1957 goldtop



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# SOLID GOLD

But—even at the bridge's lowest setting—the string action was too high, so Gibson had no choice but to adapt the bridge and wrap the strings around underneath it.

This bridge arrangement on early Les Paul goldtops meant that sustain suffered,

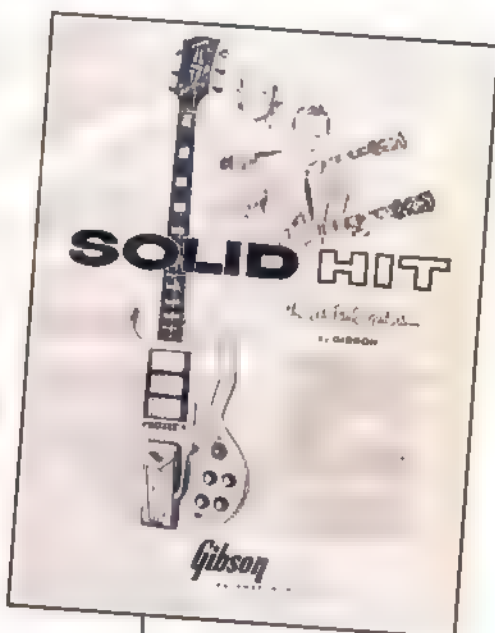
intonation was inaccurate, and popular hand-damping techniques were virtually impossible. It was clearly unworkable, as Paul pointed out to Gibson.

"They made the first guitar wrong," he remembered. "I don't know how many went out wrong that weren't playable. When they sent me mine, I stopped them. They had run the strings under the bridge instead of over, and hadn't pitched the neck. They had it all screwed up."

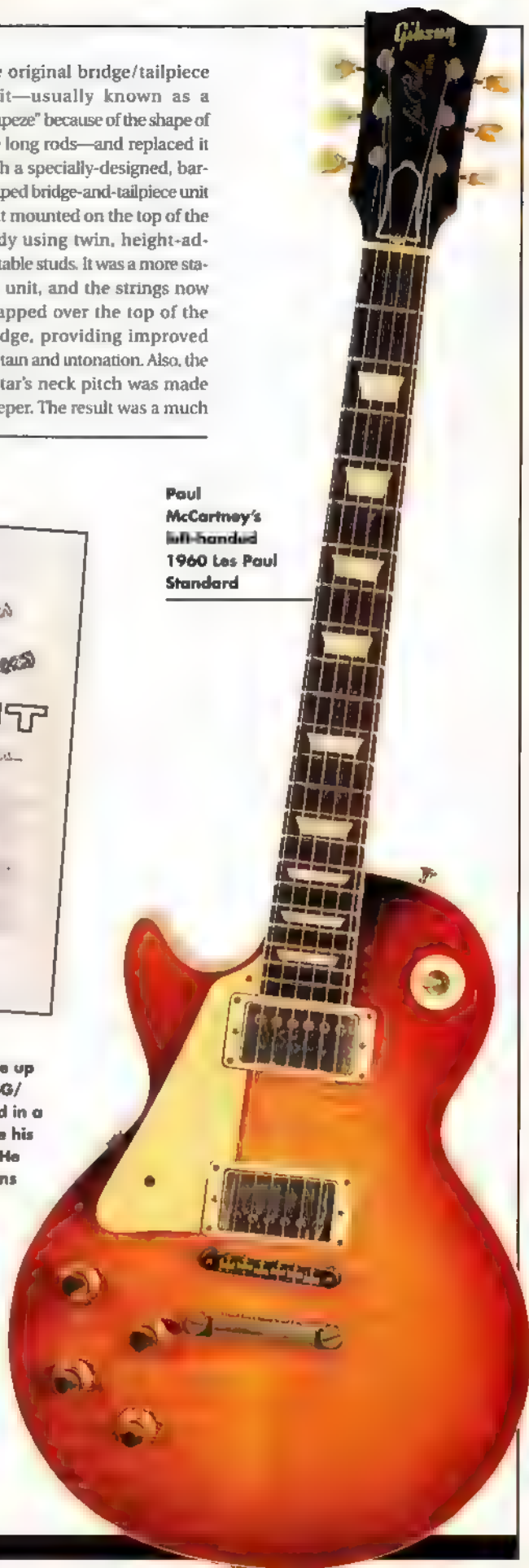
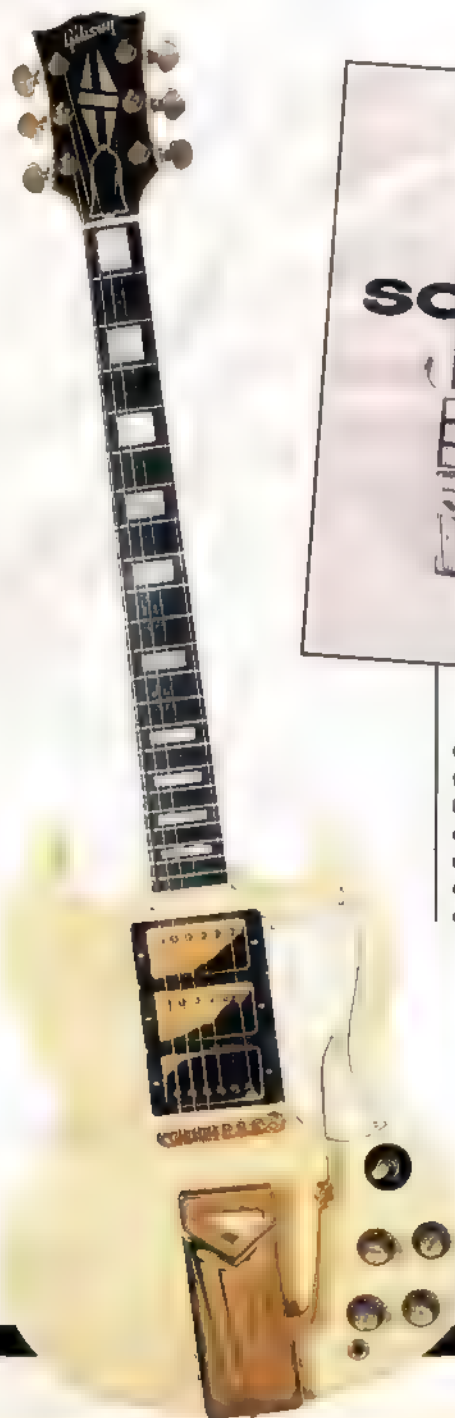
During 1953, Gibson dropped

the original bridge/tailpiece unit—usually known as a "trapeze" because of the shape of the long rods—and replaced it with a specially-designed, bar-shaped bridge-and-tailpiece unit that mounted on the top of the body using twin, height-adjustable studs. It was a more stable unit, and the strings now wrapped over the top of the bridge, providing improved sustain and intonation. Also, the guitar's neck pitch was made steeper. The result was a much

Paul McCartney's left-handed 1960 Les Paul Standard



Gibson's attempt to spice up the line with the 1961 SG/Les Paul Custom resulted in a demand by Paul to have his name removed from it. He didn't dig the sharp horns and its "weak" neck.



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# SOLID GOLD

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## THE CUSTOM AND JUNIOR

In a move designed to widen the market still further for solid-body guitars, Gibson issued two new Les Paul models in 1954, the Custom and the Junior. The two-pickup Custom looked

classy with its all-black finish, multiple binding, block-shaped position markers in an ebony fingerboard, and gold-plated hardware, and was indeed more expensive than the goldtop. Paul said that he chose the black color for the Custom. "When you're on stage with a black tuxedo and a black guitar," he said, "the people can see your hands move with a spotlight on them. They'll see your hands flying."

The Custom had an all-mahogany body, as favored by Les Paul himself, rather than the maple/mahogany mix of the

goldtop, which gave the new guitar a mellower tone. Paul insists that Gibson got the timber arrangements the wrong way around, and that as far as he was concerned the cheaper goldtop should have been all-mahogany, while the costlier Custom should have sported the more elaborate maple-and-mahogany combination. The Les Paul Custom was promoted in Gibson catalogues as "the fretless wonder" because of its use of very low, flat fretwire.

In addition to its conven-

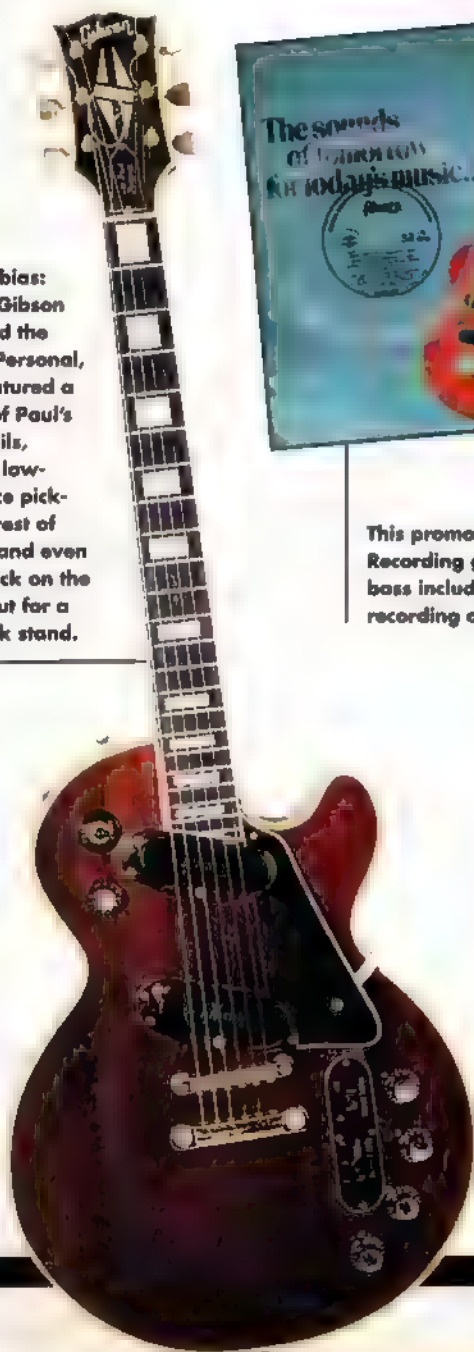
*Continued on page 78*

**Personal bias:** In 1969, Gibson introduced the Les Paul Personal, which featured a number of Paul's fave details, including low-impedance pickups, a forest of controls, and even an XLR jack on the upper bout for a gooseneck stand.



This promo piece for the Recording guitar and Triumph bass included a flexi-disc recording of the instruments.

1972  
Les Paul  
Recording



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convinced Hans Peter Wilfer, the president of Warwick, to produce the Framus line in his renowned Warwick factory in Germany. By the mid-1990's, Framus guitars and amps were reborn, and better than ever.

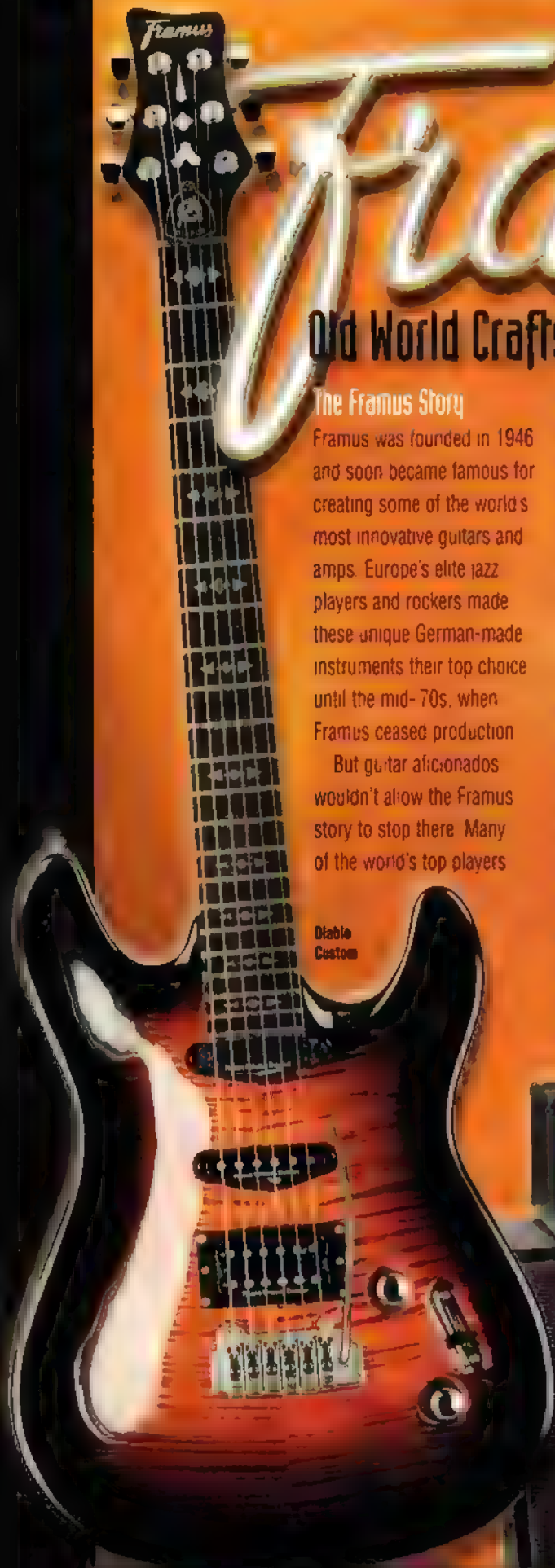
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"When I first had National, Gibson, and the Larson Brothers build me some solidbody guitars, they thought I was nuttier than a fruitcake," says Paul, shown in his home studio with his LP Recording model (with low-impedance pickups and upper-bout mic holder) and The Log (left foreground). "They said, 'Where the hell is the sound going to come from?'"



## LES PAUL ON THE LES PAUL



His name graces one of the most revered guitars of all time, but even that honor doesn't do justice to Les Paul's impact on music. This is, after

all, the man who kicked the solidbody electric into prominence with "The Log," manifested the concept of delay as a signal-processing effect, and revolutionized recording by developing multitracking and layering techniques in the late '40s. (Paul is probably the first artist to produce multitracked hits in a home studio). He's also a wicked guitarist who, at 87, still plays a regular Monday night gig at the Iridium in New York City.

Paul's relationship with Gibson remains close and happy after all these years—even though, as noted in the excerpts published here from 50 Years of the Gibson Les Paul, there's some historical "disagreement" over his role in the development of the Les Paul guitar

"I love the new Les Paul guitars," says Paul. "When Henry [Juszkiewicz, Gibson Chairman and CEO] bought Gibson in 1987, he called me in, and said, 'I don't want to do anything but listen.' And I said, 'Great—because I love to talk!' We spent a whole day together, and all I did was bitch about everything we could have done better. I just painted the picture exactly the way it was. And I'm telling you, Henry deserves a tremendous amount of credit for turning that company around."

Paul does love to talk. His enthusiasm for music and technology is absolutely explosive, and, for a guitarist and recording zealot, speaking to Paul is like communicating directly with heaven. Here, he chats about the power of the solidbody, assesses the 50-year reign of the Les Paul series, and reveals his mother's role in the history of modern guitarcraft.

—MICHAEL MOLEND

### THE MACHISMO FACTOR

"I wanted people to hear me," declares Paul. "That's where the whole idea of a solidbody guitar came from. In the '30s, the archtop electric was such an *apologetic* instrument. On the bandstand, it was so difficult battling with a drummer, the horns, and all the instruments that had so much power. With a solidbody, guitarists could get louder and express themselves. Instead of being wimps, we'd become one of the most powerful people in the band. We could turn that mother up and do what we couldn't do before."

### MOM KNOWS BEST

"When I started working with the concept of a solidbody, I decided to go to two extremes for the body. I wanted to get the softest wood and the hardest piece of metal

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## LES PAUL ON THE LES PAUL

that I could find, and then decide which way to go. So I borrowed a wagon—without permission—and got five kids to help me lug home an abandoned, two-and-a-half-foot piece of rail from a nearby railroad track. Then I got a piece of wood. I put two spikes into each piece—one spike was the bridge and the other was the nut—and I suspended a single string over a telephone coil.

"After I played the two 'guitars,' I went running to my mother and said, 'Mom, I got it. I got the most beautiful sound in the world!' It was the railroad track—it sustained beautifully, while the wood kind of died on me. But my mom said, 'You'll never see a singing cowboy on a horse with a piece of railroad track.' She was right. It wasn't a practical idea."

### THE EYES HAVE IT

"When I finished 'The Log' back in 1941, I didn't put wings on it—it was just a strip of wood. I took it to this joint called Gladys's to try it out with a trio, and I died. I played 'The Sheik of Araby,' and it was stupid—it just didn't go nowhere. I was pretty disappointed, so I went home and thought about it. At that

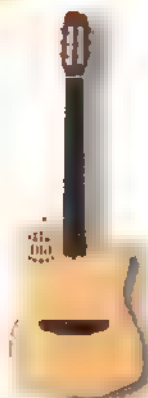
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## LES PAUL ON THE LES PAUL

time, Epiphone used to let me use their factory every Sunday to build whatever I wanted to, so I went in there, built two wings, and clamped one to each side of The Log. Then I went back to the very same club, and played the same song with the same group, and the place just went crazy. The whole experience taught me that the audience hears with its eyes. And not only was a stick of wood difficult for me to play, but I looked like a geek. From that point, it was obvious that any successful solidbody had to look like a guitar—no more ideas like building guitars from railroad tracks!"

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## SOLID GOLD

Continued from page 71

tional P-90 at the bridge, the Les Paul Custom featured a new style of pickup at the neck. This unit was soon nicknamed the alnico—a reference to the aluminum-nickel-cobalt alloy used for its distinctive rectangular magnetic polepieces (although alnico is certainly not unique to this pickup). It was designed by Seth Lover, a radio and electronics expert who had worked on and off for Gibson in the 1940s and early 1950s while he also did teaching and installation jobs for the U.S. Navy. After several comings and goings, Lover joined Gibson's

electronics department permanently in 1952.

The Custom had another new piece of Gibson hardware. It was the first Les Paul model to receive the company's Tune-o-matic bridge, used in conjunction with a separate bar-shaped



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tailpiece. Patented by McCarty, the Tune-o-matic offered the opportunity to individually adjust the intonation of each string, thus improving tuning accuracy. From 1955, it also became a feature of the goldtop model.

## LOVER BUCKS THE HUM

Meanwhile in the Gibson electronics department—which was run by Walt Fuller—the industrious Lover started work on another new pickup. The idea was to try to find a way to cut down the hum and electrical interference that plagued standard single-coil pickups, Gibson's ubiquitous P-90 included. Lover contemplated the humbucking "choke coil" found in some Gibson amplifiers, installed to eliminate the hum dispensed by their power transformers. "I thought," recalled Lover, "that if we can make humbucking chokes, why can't we make humbucking pickups?"

Additional screening for Gibson's original humbucking pickup was provided by a metal cover. "The cover helps shield away electrostatic noises from fluorescent lamps and so forth," Lover said. "I needed a material with high resistance so it wouldn't affect the high-frequency response, and I considered non-magnetic stainless steel. But you can't solder to it. German silver [an alloy of copper, nickel, and zinc, has high

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## SOLID GOLD

resistance, and you could solder to it, so I used that. The prototype didn't have adjusting screws, but our sales people wanted them—so that they would have something to talk to the dealers about. The screws were added before we went into production. Gibson began to use the new humbuckers in the early months of 1957, and started to replace the P-90 single-coil pickups on the Les Paul goldtop and Custom that year. The Custom was promoted to a three-pickup guitar in its new humbucker-equipped style.

## THE SG/LES PAUL

Les Paul sales declined in 1960 after a peak in 1959. By 1961, Gibson had decided on a complete redesign of the line in an effort to try to reactivate sales. One of the first series of new models to benefit from Gibson's expanded production facilities was the revised Les Paul design, the SG (Solid Guitar). At first, these completely new instruments with their highly sculpted, double-cutaway design continued to be named Les Paul models, so guitars of this new style made between 1961 and 1963 with suitable markings are now known as SG/Les Pauls. But, by 1963, the Les Paul name had been removed, and the models officially continued as SGs. McCarty, who was still pres-

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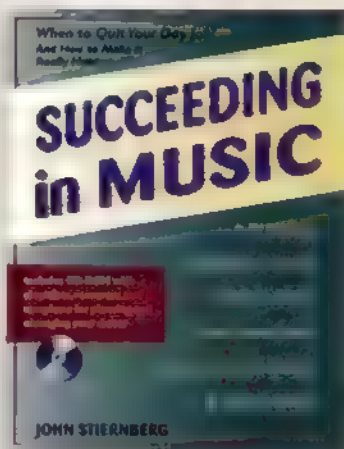
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## SOLID GOLD

ident at Gibson, said Paul's name was taken off because the association had become less of a commercial bonus due to Paul's declining popularity as a recording artist.

But the main reason that Paul's name was dropped from Gibson guitars in 1963 relates to his divorce from Mary Ford. Paul had agreed with Gibson to wait until the divorce was over before starting discussions to renew his contract with the company. Paul did not want to sign any fresh contract bringing in new money while the divorce proceedings were underway because Ford's lawyers would ask for part of it in the divorce settlement. "My contract ended in '62," said Paul, "and Gibson could not make any more Les Paul guitars."

Paul also said that he didn't like the design of the new SG/Les Paul models—and that this was another reason for the removal of his name from them. "It was too thin, and they had moved the front pickup away from the fingerboard so they could fit my name in there," Paul explained to Tom Wheeler in *American Guitars*. "The neck was too skinny, and I didn't like the way it joined the body—there wasn't enough wood. So I called Gibson and asked them to take my name off the thing. It wasn't my design."

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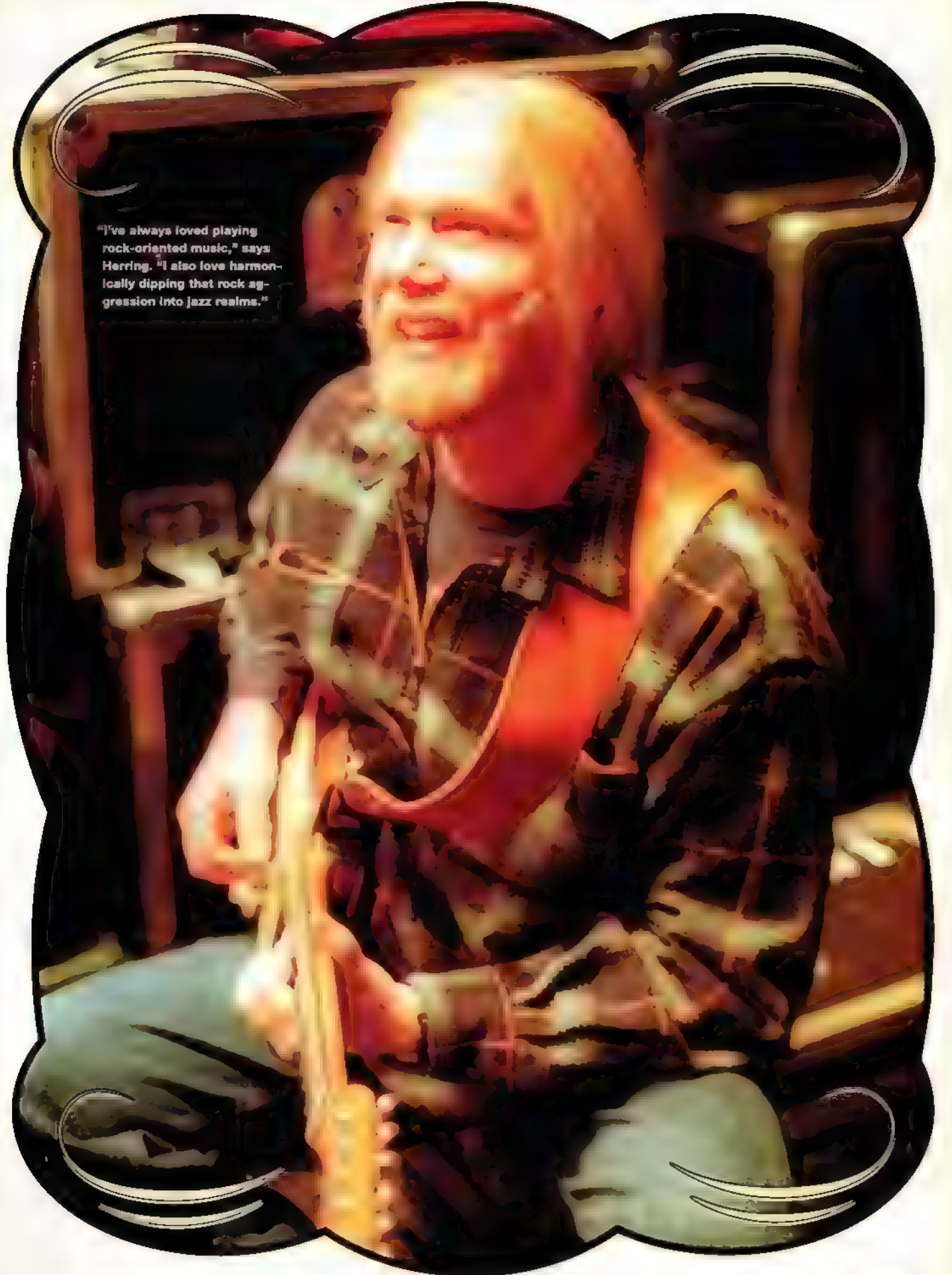
## JIMMY HERRING'S ULTRA-HIP IMPROV TIPS

**F**ew things are more explosive than Jimmy Herring's solos. Except, perhaps, his telephone, which has been blowing up lately. Headliners such as the Allman Brothers Band, Blues Traveler, the Dave Matthews Band, Billy Cobham, Phish, Bruce Hornsby, Frogwings, Aquarium Rescue Unit, Alfonso Johnson, Widespread Panic, Gov't Mule, and others want Herring on their stage because he solos like John Coltrane through a Marshall—and his fiery tone, ferocious chops, and humble nature make him a treasure in any band ■ Herring forged his intrepid style by combining several powerful influences. Born in Fayetteville, > > >

BY JUDE GOLD

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAY BLAKESBERG





"I've always loved playing rock-oriented music," says Herring. "I also love harmonically dipping that rock aggression into jazz realms."



North Carolina, he was exposed to guitar music early on when his older brothers spun Allman Brothers and Jimi Hendrix records constantly.

"The melodies were so powerful, I could hear them in my head, even when the albums weren't playing," he recalls. "As I got older, I could play Led Zeppelin riffs note for note, but I got frustrated quickly because I realized nobody could sing like Robert Plant. That's when my brother said, 'Well, have you checked out any instrumental music?' He turned me on to Return to Forever, the Mahavishnu Orchestra, and the Dixie Dregs, and I was floored. Hearing how disciplined and free Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin, and Steve Morse all were, I started practicing a lot more seriously. I began by lifting melodic patterns off their records and revoicing them all over the neck."

These days, you'll find Herring delivering his magic onstage with former Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh, and on the brand new Phil and Friends CD *There and Back Again* (Columbia). But if you want to hear Herring at his most unrestrained, check out Project Z's self-titled release on Terminus records, where he and co-guitarist Derek Trucks improvise entire songs.

From secret uses of the pentatonic scale to bluegrass, bebop blues, free jazz, and chord melody, Herring—with a heaping helping of Southern hospitality—is about to share with you several inspiring musical examples. Hopefully, they'll take your soloing—as well as your entire concept of improvisation—to new dimensions.

## MIND-BLOWING PENTATONICS

Most players have used the A-minor pentatonic fingering in Ex. 1 a zillion times. "The obvious way to use the scale is off the root of a minor-7th chord," says Herring, ripping into the delicious A-minor pentatonic run in Ex. 2a. "But when you listen to great horn players like John Coltrane and Michael Brecker—or guitarists who were inspired by them, like Scott Henderson—you can hear many exciting new ways to use the pentatonic scale. For instance, try moving the scale up a whole-step against the Am7 chord—it's like you're playing B-minor pentatonic over A minor."

To demonstrate, Herring plays the lick from Ex. 2a up two frets. Against the key of A minor, the sound is refreshingly modal. By repositioning the scale, the 2 and 6 (B and F#) are added to the mix, while the 3 and the 7 (C and G) disappear. To really hear this effect in action, tape yourself strumming (or have a friend accompany you) in A-minor as you play in the new position. Herring serves up another delicious "up a whole-step" pentatonic run in Ex. 2b. It starts at the fifth position, but after two notes quickly jumps up two frets to the new B-minor box. Dig the hip

stacked fourths—they give this lick reach.

"You can also use the pentatonic scale up a fifth, starting at the 12th fret," suggests Herring, playing the soaring line in Ex. 2c. "If you put all three positions together, it's really just the Dorian mode in A. But this approach gives you three different ways of looking at it."

## MAJOR MATTERS

"Another slick way to use the minor-pentatonic shape is over major-7th voicings," says Herring, who sets the key by playing the Amaj7 chord in Ex. 3a. "Now, try moving the A-minor pentatonic scale up a major third. [Moving the A-minor box up to the 9th fret, he plays the spectacular line in Ex. 3b.] 'I'm really just playing C# blues over A major.' Because it never tags the tonic, A, this use of the pentatonic box is great for adding an evasive, rootless vibe to your solos."

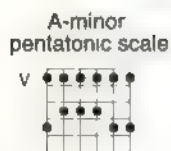
"You can also use the pentatonic scale down a half-step in major keys," says Herring. "Play G#-minor pentatonic over A major, and you get an interesting, sharpened-11th sound." First, strum the Amaj7#11 chord in Ex. 4a to acclimate your ears. Then try the run in Ex. 4b. It never leaves the 4th-fret pentatonic box, yet it adds a zesty, Lydian flavor in the key of A major.

## THE FINAL FRONTIER

Put on your space suit. Herring is about to show you how to launch solos that break the gravitational pull of conventional harmony using just the pentatonic scale.

"Some of the ways I use the scale won't

Ex. 1



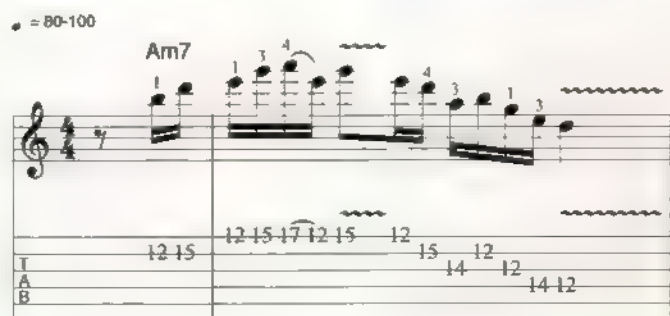
Ex. 2a



Ex. 2b



Ex. 2c

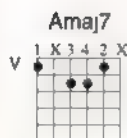




work when you're playing with people who aren't receptive to sounds that may bend some ears," cautions Herring. "For example, when you're in A minor, try moving the pentatonic scale up a half-step and back again in the middle of a phrase [Ex. 5 illustrates how Herring shifts the scale back and forth between the fifth and sixth positions every four notes.] But my favorite way to use the pentatonic scale is how Coltrane did on 'Giant Steps'—in minor thirds. To do this, you *could* just take the minor-pentatonic box and move it up the neck three frets at a time. But rather than jump up and down the fretboard, try staying in one position. If you can shoot fragments from those keys at a static A chord of your choosing, the sound is really cool."

To hear this in action, check out Herring's angular improvisation in Ex. 6. This time, because he's essentially remaining in one position, the pentatonic shape *does* change. But if you analyze the notes, you'll see that each time the chord goes up a minor third, the lick's pitches correspond perfectly with the appropriate pentatonic scale.

Ex. 3a



Ex. 3b

♩ = 80-100

Amaj7

Ex. 4a



Ex. 4b

♩ = 80-100

Amaj7#11

Ex. 6

♩ = 80-100

Am7 Cm7 Ebm7 F#m7

## IMPROV TOOLS

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examples in this lesson, picture them screaming through Herring's most dynamic rig—a '73 Marshall Super Lead 100-watt head and a '64 Fender Showman head, each driving a Marshall 4x12 cab.

"I use an Ernie Ball Stereo Volume/Pan pedal to pan between them," says Herring. "In the toe position, it's all Marshall, but as you pull back, the other head comes in until it's all Fender."

Herring typically uses his Paul Reed Smith McCarty hollowbodies to surf waves of feedback. "I love the way those guitars scream," he says. "I can make any note sustain forever, and I control the mayhem with an Ernie Ball volume pedal. The guitars come with underwound pickups to keep them from feed-

ing back, but since I want them to feed back, I have PRS put in their standard solidbody pickups."

Herring also has plenty of all-Fender nights. "I often run a reissue Twin, or my two '60s Super Reverbs, and my new favorite guitar—a '63 Fender Strat," he says. The Strat was a gift from Phil Lesh, and Herring plugs it into an Ibanez Tube Screamer and a Hughes & Kettner Tube Factor that's used for a clean boost.

All of Herring's guitars have gigantic Dunlop 6000 frets. "They make the guitar a lot easier to play, and allow you to leave the action high, which I think makes guitars speak better," he says. "Plus, bending notes is easier with fat frets. But be careful—if you choke the strings too hard, the notes will go sharp."

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# FIRE & FLOW

## FEISTY FLAT-PICKING

"I like to take traditional stuff and throw in chromatic notes," says Herring. This results in twangy, flat-picking solos that really show off Herring's Southern roots—such as the head-turning moves in Ex. 7. Try them over a quick country vamp on A7. Herring is working from the A-major-pentatonic box (which has the same fingering as its relative minor version, F#-minor pentatonic). The chromatic notes are C# and Eb, and Herring adds a Mixolydian flavor

by including G# and D. Once you work these twists and turns up to speed—and learn to nail the half-step slides—you'll have a smoking-hot approach to chicken pickin' over dominant-7th chords.

To see how Herring translates these moves to the swing-jazz camp, check out the infectious eighth-notes in Ex. 8a. They make a great melodic hook over a bebop blues in C, and they're similar to Herring's fat licks on "Albright Special" from *Project Z*.

"A lot of that stuff is inspired by Charlie Christian," says Herring. Give the notes a swing feel, and use the passage over C7, the I7 chord of a 12-bar blues in C. When you're ready to tackle the IV7 chord, Herring proves with Ex. 8b that all you need are three notes to tear a hole in F7. Avoiding the root, he uses just C, A, and Eb and a repeated pull-off.

Try completing your jazz-blues progression



"I come from the South, where you catch a lot of crap about not being very smart or making shallow music," says Herring. "Then came Steve Morse, who played incredibly sophisticated stuff that was still undeniably Southern. It was like John McLaughlin meets the Allman Brothers."

### Ex. 7

♩ = 120

Chicken pickin'

A7

### Ex. 8a

♩ = 208

Swing feel

(I)  
C7

### Ex. 8b

♩ = 208

Swing feel

(IV7)  
F7

# FIRE & FLOW

with Ex. 8c—which surfs the G7-F7-C7 turnaround with a sax player's melodic dexterity. Don't let the chromaticism throw you. Once you

get these notes under your fingers, a satisfying melody will emerge, and you'll all but hear the word "bebop" in the lick's last two notes.

## CELESTIAL CLUSTERS

One way Herring frees himself as a soloist is by introducing harmonically-open chordal backdrops, such as the shimmering passage in Ex. 9. "When I want to bust into a tonally ambiguous groove in E, I'll use a progression like this one," he says. "The cool things

are the minor seconds (the clanging intervals in the lowest two voices of the chords in measures 1 and 3.)"

## ALL IN THE WRIST

Volume swells provide another color in Herring's solos. Using his picking-hand pinky on his volume knob (see Fig. 1), Herring is quite nimble at making intervals of sixths and fifths leap out of his guitar as if he were a pedal steel player—and he does it *quickly*, often

### Ex. 8c

♩ = 208  
Swing feel

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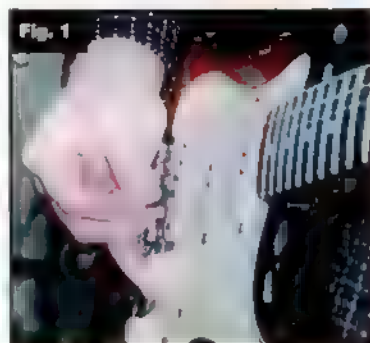


### Ex. 9

Freely

### Ex. 10

\* Fade in w/ volume control





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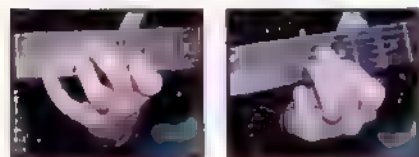
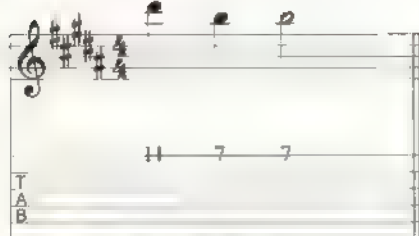
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# FIRE & FLOW

## Ex. 11

Freely

Bmaj7



## Ex. 12

Freely

Badd11 Bmaj7



modulating freely from key to key. See how fast you are at this approach by applying it to the vibrant two-note grips in Ex. 10. Or, just play these intervals straight and enjoy their uplifting, C-major sound.

## KNOCKOUT HARMONY

Like Morse and another of Herring's favorite guitarists, Allan Holdsworth, Herring enjoys playing transcendent chord melodies. To test-drive one of Herring's stellar passages, start by playing the simple three-note melody in Ex. 11, which suggests B major. Then move on to Ex. 12, which shows you how Herring harmonizes the same melody several different ways.

"I use chords like these on my intro to 'Utensil Oceans' from *Project Z*," he says. "And

I gave the passage a dreamy, ethereal quality by swelling in the chords with a volume pedal and adding some reverb and delay."

In each of Ex. 12's first three bars, you'll spy Ex. 11's simple melody in the upper voice, though Herring harmonizes it differently each time. Bar 4 features a moody but simple *Esus2* chord that has a jangly sound due to its open B string. To complete the example, leave your fourth finger planted on the high B throughout measures 5, 6, and 7, and check out how Herring recasts the note in five dazzling clusters.

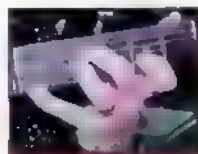
The more you practice progressions like this one, the more you'll be able to improvise similar chord melodies on the fly. One way Herring learned to find new chords was by sitting



Badd11 Bmaj7 G#m#5

Badd11 Bmaj7 Bm7#5

Esus2



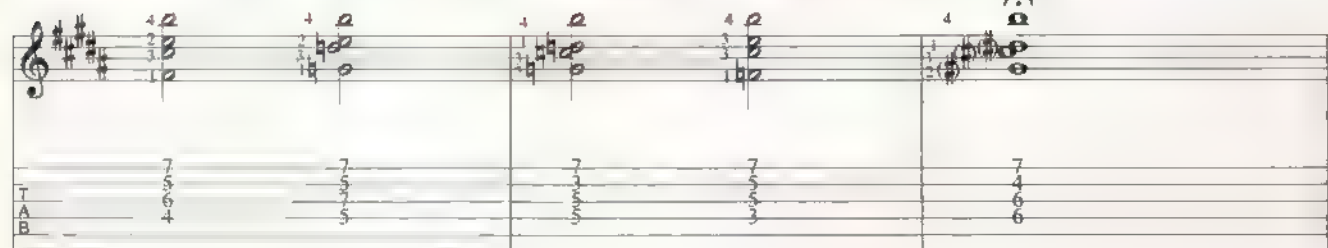
F#7sus4

Em7

Cmaj9(no3)

Fmaj7#11(no3)

B6/9



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## GUEST GURU

# Robben Ford's Universal Groove

BY JUDE GOLD



**WITH HIS STINGING,**

soulful solos and flawless pocket, Robben Ford has an uncanny knack for making complex music seem simple. Conversely, the guitarist can elevate a mundane one-chord vamp into something divine. Perhaps this is because Ford has successfully tackled so many genres. What has Ford learned from all of his musical adventures? "We're all playing the same things," he says.

To prove that common threads abound in music, Ford will take a I-VI-II-V progression and show that whether it's played with a doo-wop group's simplicity or a bebop pianist's extended chords and slick substitutions, the underlying vibe is the same—just one more universal phrase in the language of music.

### Chromatic Magic

Ford starts things off by playing Ex. 1, humorously giving the I-VI-II-V a clichéd, '50s-jukebox phrasing to illustrate what a workhorse it has been over the years. (As you check out the chord diagrams, dig

how Ford often uses his thumb to fret bass notes.) In the next few examples, Ford will show you some exciting ways to elaborate on this timeless progression.

"One easy way to generate a I-VI-II-V is to play any chord and then move it up a minor third and come back down chromatically," says Ford, playing Ex. 2a. "This involves tritone substitution. For example, we're simply substituting the A dominant-7th chord [from Ex. 1] with one that's built off E $\flat$ , which is a tritone away from A."

That is, E $\flat$ 9 is a *tritone substitute* for A7. The reason this sounds so smooth is because A7 and E $\flat$ 9 have two notes in common. G and C $\sharp$  (which is enharmonically equivalent to D $\flat$ ). And when you pull the same trick on G7 by substituting it with D $\flat$ 9, your progression suddenly has a perfect chromatic descent in every voice, and you never even have to change your grip. When it comes to comping these chords, a good place to start is with Freddie Green-inspired quarter-note strums (two per chord).

Now, try this approach on other grips, such as the C6/9 or C13 in

### Ex. 2a

Tritone substitution

Chord diagrams for Ex. 2a: (I) C9, (VI) E $\flat$ 9, (II) D9, (V) D $\flat$ 9. Below the diagrams is a musical staff showing the progression in 4/4 time.

### Ex. 2b

Chord diagrams for Ex. 2b: C6/9, C13. Below the diagrams is a musical staff showing the progression in 4/4 time.



### Ex. 3

Slow swing

Chord diagrams for Ex. 3: C7, A $\sharp$ 5 $\sharp$ 9, D7 $\sharp$ 5 $\sharp$ 9, D $\flat$ 13, C13, E $\flat$ 9, D13, G7 $\sharp$ 5 $\sharp$ 9, C9, E $\flat$ 13 $\flat$ 5, D7 $\sharp$ 5 $\sharp$ 9, D $\flat$ 13. Below the diagrams are two musical staves showing the progression in 4/4 time.

### Ex. 1

Slow swing

Chord diagrams for Ex. 1: (I) C9, (VI) A7, (II) D9, (V) G7. Below the diagrams is a musical staff showing the progression in 4/4 time. A note indicates \*T = thumb.



**Ex. 2b** Fret either chord and put it through the same motions you did the C9 in Ex. 2a. Voilà! Another killer I-VI-II-V.

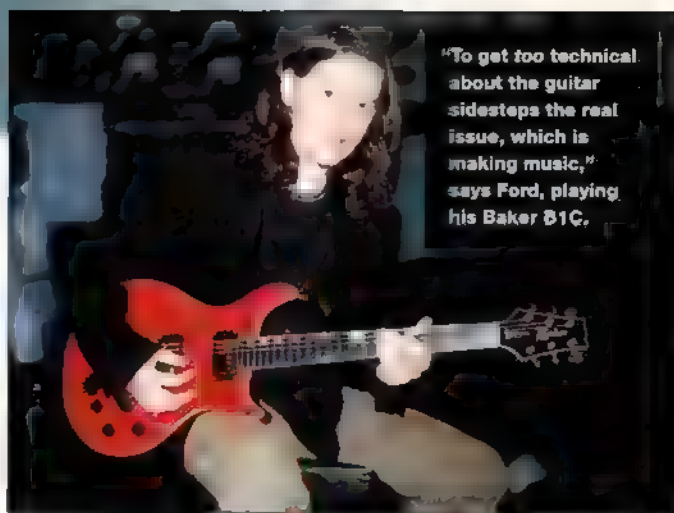
## Baker's Recipes

Early in his career, when Ford was hungry for new chords, he found a smorgasbord of them in an old Mickey Baker guitar book. To this day, Ford uses many of Baker's fat voicings, and you can feast your fingers on some of these shapes in Ex. 3. Harmonically, this is a highly evolved approach to I-VI-II-Vs. If you analyze the progression, however, you'll find the recipe

is simple. Just take a I-VI-II-V and throw in two special ingredients: spicy extensions (such as sharped-9ths, 5ths, etc.) and tritone substitutions. When you're playing these grips with a rhythm section, you can, like Ford, make things easier for your fretting hand by dropping some of the bass notes and leaving them to the bass player.

## Single-Note Sting

The beauty of a Ford solo is that no matter how busy or sparse it is, the impact is always the same: *huge*. Ford's leads seem hardwired to his heart, and in Ex. 4, Ford comes at



"To get too technical about the guitar sidesteps the real issue, which is making music," says Ford, playing his Baker B1C.

you with some melodic ideas you can try over I-VI-II-Vs. Enjoy the open sound of the first phrase, have a blast with the sixteenth-notes in

the second. For more Ford fireworks, check out his latest release, *Blue Moon* [Concord Jazz].

### Ex. 4

I-VI-II-V solo

♩ = 80

Swing feel

## READER'S CHALLENGE • TWANG DANG DOODLE

"I'VE BEEN PLAYING CLOSE TO 30 YEARS, AND I'VE GOT A FEW tricks up my sleeve," says Doug Coffman of Niantic, Illinois. "I've also got a lot of bad habits," he adds. Well, apparently, not on the *guitar*, because we heard nothing but tasty technique in Coffman's winning submission. Check out how he cleverly employs open strings, hammer-ons, splashes of chromaticism, and a time-stopping bent note in his country cadenza.

"It's a bluegrass, chicken-pickin' lick," offers Coffman. "Some notes

are plucked with the middle finger, others with the pick." The hybrid pick-and-fingers approach helps the sixteenth-notes fly by with minimal effort. "And if you arch your fretting-hand fingers so the open strings stay ringing, you'll get a great banjo-like effect," offers Coffman. With bad habits like these, who needs *good* ones?

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## CLASSIC COLUMN

# Modal Improvisation

BY JERRY HAHN



**MODAL IMPROVISATION** is characterized by the absence of frequent chord changes. One of the most popular modes used in modal improvisation is the Dorian mode, which starts

and ends on the second degree of a major scale. *D* Dorian, for example, is the one-octave scale from *D* to *D* of the *C* major scale (or, *D*, *E*, *F*, *G*, *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D*). Though it is a minor scale, *D* Dorian—like *C* major—has no sharps or flats.

One of the earliest and best examples of modal jazz is "So What," from Miles Davis' landmark album *Kind of Blue* [1959]. The song has two sections of *D* Dorian, followed by one sec-

tion of *E $\flat$*  Dorian, and then a final section of *D* Dorian. This compositional form is known as AABA. Each section is eight measures long, and each AABA is one chorus. Other great examples of modal improv can be heard on John Coltrane's *Live at Birdland* and *My Favorite Things* albums. "Prime Time," from my album *Moses*, is an example of jazz-rock modal improv.

Also used in improvisation are three other modes—Ionian (the major scale), Lydian (starting and ending on the fourth degree of the major scale), and Mixolydian (starting and ending on the fifth degree of the major scale). Lydian and Ionian work nicely over major chords. Mixolydian over dominant-7th voicings, and Dorian over minor keys.

Below are some triads and chords derived from the *C* major scale that can be used when comping or soloing over modal tunes in *D* minor, *C* major, or *F* major. These shapes also sound good over songs based on *G7*. (Notice that many of these chords are voiced with a fourth on top in order to achieve an *open* sound.) Any combination of notes from the *C* major scale may be played in any of these keys. You can also use any of the modes described above, though they are all really just the *C* major scale starting on different degrees.

*Jerry Hahn was one of GP's most active contributors throughout the '70s. This column was originally published in the September 1974 issue.*



Chord voicings for the third system:

- Dm9/11
- (Dm9) Fmaj7
- Cmaj7
- G13
- Dm9/13
- Dmadd9
- Fmaj7
- Cmaj7



# SONIC SNAPSHOT

# Doc Watson

BY ADAM LEVY



## ON THE FACE OF IT, BLUE-

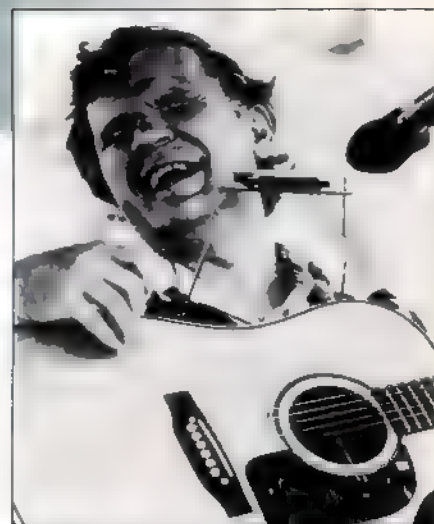
grass music may seem to be pretty simple stuff. Pick up an acoustic guitar, strum a little G, C, and D, sing about love and/or murder, and that's about the size of it—right? Sure, but the style also features hotrod guitar. In fact, if you like the sound of steel-string melodies revved up to redline speeds, bluegrass is one of the best places to hear it. And Arthel "Doc" Watson has been one of the genre's pacesetters, flooring generations of listeners with his speed, clarity, and musical ingenuity. To borrow some of Watson's fiddle-inspired fire, let's check out a couple of lines inspired by the guitarist's brilliant adaptation of the traditional fiddle tune "Beaumont Rag," originally released on his 1965 album *Doc Watson & Son*. (To play along precisely, you'll need to capo the 2nd fret.)

The tune opens simply enough, with a descending diatonic melody winding downward

from A7's 7th degree, G (Ex. 1a). Things get more exciting in measure 2, as fretted B's rub against open-string (capoed) C's. Even though the two notes don't actually sound at the same time, they create the illusion of a clanging minor-second overlap. This sparkly collision is a key ingredient in the bluegrass spice rack.

Note that B# and C# are the #2 and 3 of the A7 chord. When the harmony changes in measure 3, Watson reintroduces this tart flavor with E# and F#, the #2 and 3 of D. Finally, the line travels down from D to F#, and then coils back up to A.

In contrast, Ex. 1b sports unusually wide intervals. In measure 1 and the first two beats of measure 2, Watson rolls a first-inversion A major triad (C#-E-A), alternately substituting Bs for As (on the *and* of three in measure 1 and the *and* of two in measure 2) to make things wilder. He follows with the same closing line he played in Ex. 1a, adding three more notes to finish on a low D. This time, however, the tag starts on beat one



"If the picker's personality isn't expressed in the picking technique, there's something missing."  
—Watson in the July/August '72 GP.

of measure 3 (instead of on beat three of measure 3, as it did Ex. 1a).

Though long associated with dreadnought steel-string instruments, Watson developed a lot of his speed and dexterity by working up fiddle tunes on his Gibson Les Paul during an eight-year stint with Jack Williams & the Country Gentlemen in the '50s. So whether your ax of choice is a flat-top or a goldtop, don't overlook bluegrass as a rich source of inspiration.

Former GP associate editor Adam Levy is currently touring with Norah Jones. Levy's latest CD, *Buttermilk Channel*, is available at [adamlevy.com](http://adamlevy.com).

## Ex. 1a

Briskly  
\*Capo II

Ex. 1a musical notation. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo/style is marked "Briskly" and "Capo II". The notation shows a melody line and a guitar accompaniment line. The melody line starts on G4 (A7 7th degree) and descends. The guitar accompaniment line shows fret numbers and string numbers (T, A, B). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo/style is marked "Briskly" and "Capo II". The notation shows a melody line and a guitar accompaniment line. The melody line starts on G4 (A7 7th degree) and descends. The guitar accompaniment line shows fret numbers and string numbers (T, A, B). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo/style is marked "Briskly" and "Capo II".

\* Capo @ 2nd fret. All 2nd-fret notes played as open strings.

## Ex. 1b

Capo II

Ex. 1b musical notation. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo/style is marked "Capo II". The notation shows a melody line and a guitar accompaniment line. The melody line starts on G4 (A7 7th degree) and descends. The guitar accompaniment line shows fret numbers and string numbers (T, A, B). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo/style is marked "Capo II". The notation shows a melody line and a guitar accompaniment line. The melody line starts on G4 (A7 7th degree) and descends. The guitar accompaniment line shows fret numbers and string numbers (T, A, B). The key signature is one sharp (F#). The tempo/style is marked "Capo II".

**WANT TO GIVE YOUR** blues solos new momentum? Try using chord stabs as springboards for your lead licks. For example, on an up-tempo jump, swing, or rockabilly blues, play a pair of tritones in measures 1 and 3, as in **Ex. 1**. This not only creates sharply defined spaces in which to carve out your melodic statements, it also adds an infectious element of groove to your solos, as if you are comping and playing lead at the same time.

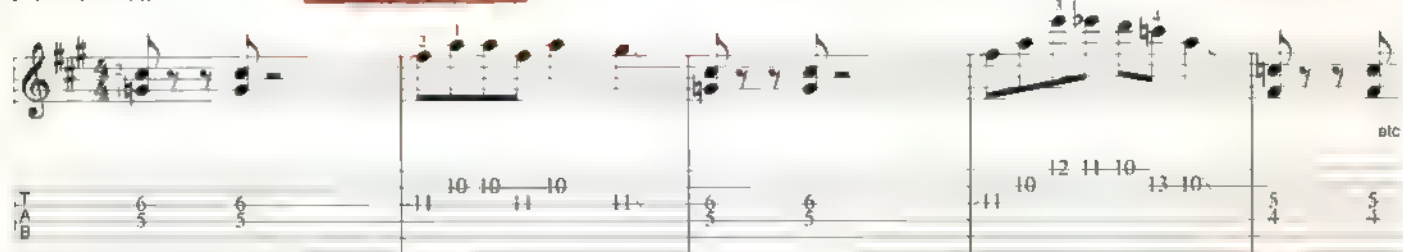
est way to imply the I7, because it's composed of the chord's most defining tones: the b7 and major 3. (In this case, we're playing G and C#, the 7 and 3 of A7). Nailing the IV7 chord is a cinch—just slide your A7 tritone down a fret, as in bar 5, and you've got F# and C, the 3 and 7 of D7. In between your stabs, play whatever major or minor pentatonic blues licks you dig—just be sure to wrap them up in time to make the next stab.

up lick that lands on the downbeat of measure 1, the first complete measure. Then, answer it with the classic R&B sliding-chord move on beat two, where you simply slide up into A6 and then back two frets, where the grip implies A9.

new sliding slab when you return to the I7, such as the hip *B6/9-A6/9* move presented in measure 3.

What happens on the V7 chord? On our up-tempo example, just move the A7 tritone up one fret and you get G# and D, the 3rd and 7th of E7. For the slow blues, move the D6-D9 slide up two frets, for an E6-E9 sound.

*David Hamburger lives in Austin, Texas, and is the author of The Acoustic Guitar Method [String Letter]. He can be found on the web at [davidhamburger.com](http://davidhamburger.com).*



5 6 5 7 5 7 5 (5) 12 10 13 10 7 5 (5) 5 6 5 7 5 5 6 (6) 7 (7) 7 (7) 6 (6)



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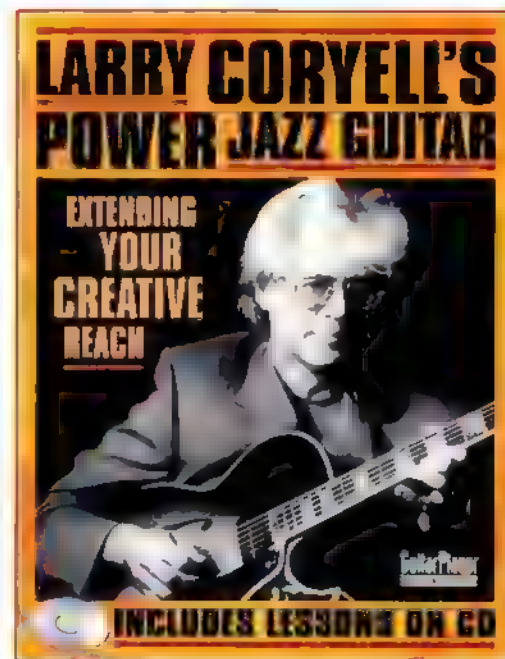
For instance, check out Ex. 1 and you'll see how Coryell, inspired by the late 20th-century composer Nicolas Slonimsky, applies 12-tone classical approaches to jazz. The scale is one of the "480 million possible combinations of the chromatic scale," writes Coryell. He then harmonizes the same notes with the eight meaty grips in Ex. 2, bridging the gap between modern classical and modern jazz with just two measures of music. *Backbeat Books*. —JUDE GOLD

### Ex. 1

♩ = 88

### Ex. 2

♩ = 88    B7b9    D7b9    Bb7#9#11    Bb7#9    C7#9    D7#9    B7#9



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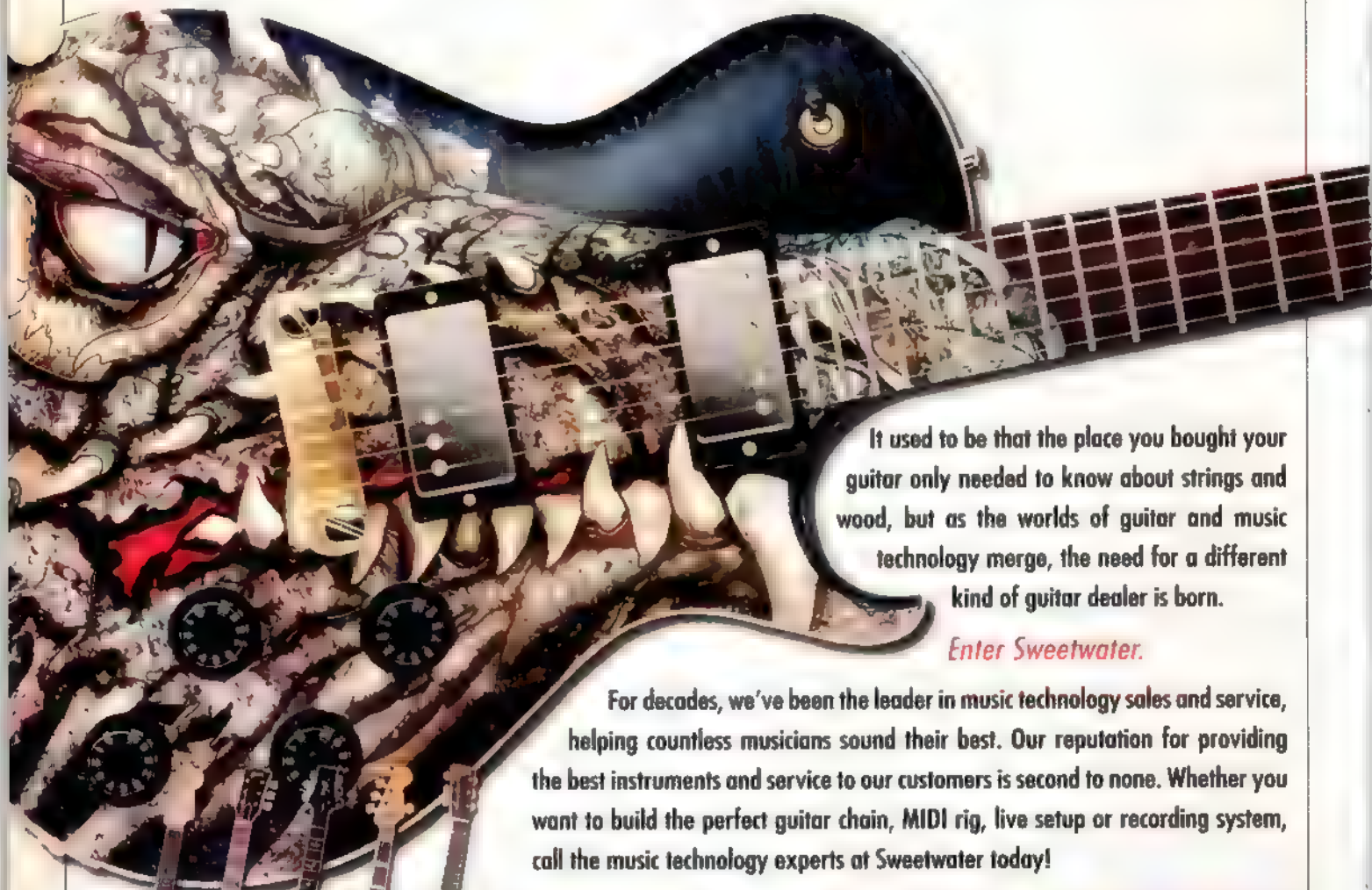
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### AUDIO



#### Nils Lofgren

*Breakaway Angel*

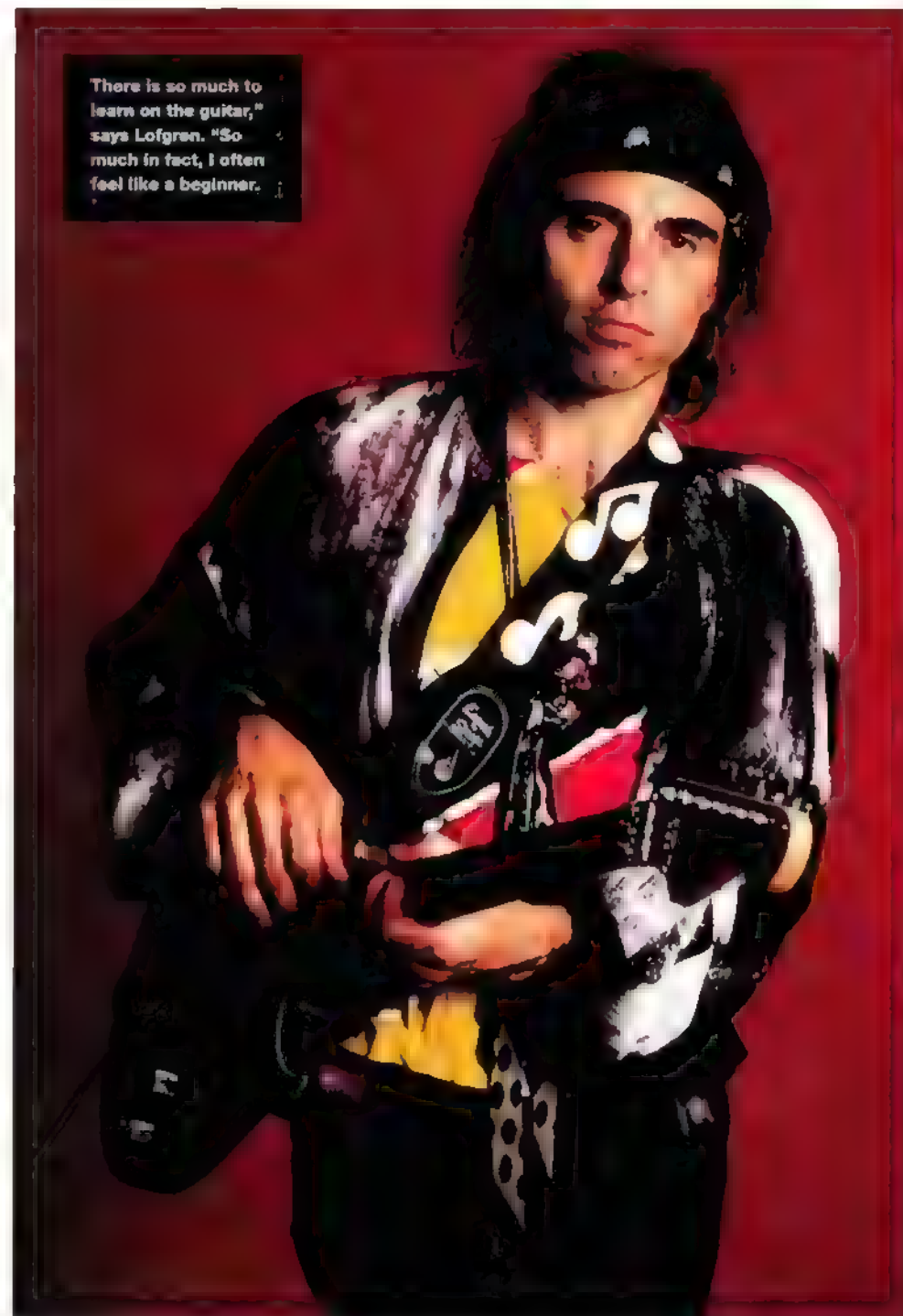
**F**rom his work with Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen to his rich body of solo albums, Nils Lofgren has proven himself to be a lasting 6-string stylist. His latest release, *Breakaway Angel* (Vision Music) finds his trademark funky phrasing and pinch harmonics in top form. But it's Lofgren's quirky tunes and continuing excitement with the acoustic guitar that make *Breakaway Angel* another high point in a career that's had more than a few. Lofgren took a moment to talk with *GP* about his current album, the record business, and performing.

—DARRIN FOX

• • • • •

*Why so long between studio records?*

I was tired of the record industry's hands-on approach to artists and their music, so once I got out of my last long-term deal, I decided to not go that route again. It's funny, because



There is so much to learn on the guitar," says Lofgren. "So much in fact, I often feel like a beginner."

it's their money, the record companies think you need to do what they say—even though they might not be musicians or producers. My album *Acoustic Live* was independently released in

1997 and, thankfully, it was very well received.

*There's a little bit of electric on Breakaway Angel, but you're still sticking with acoustic guitar for the most part.*

I found that, after *Acoustic Live*, I enjoyed the intimacy I felt soloing on acoustic. But that stuff was just me and another guitarist—I wanted *Breakaway Angel* to be a band record. I also

## Reviews

wanted to incorporate improvisation and keep it earthy with not a lot of production. For most of the record I just plugged my Takamine direct into the board.

*The record has a nice, off-the-cuff vibe.*

Well, 11 of the 14 tracks are me singing and playing live in the studio with the band.

*I guess it makes sense that you track live, since you've been known for your live show throughout your career.*

It took me a while, but over the years I've learned that making records is hard work—live is where I *thrive*. I'm someone who loves to perform. Performing is therapy. Everything else is work.

*So you're not a guy who hibernates in the*

## QUICK HITS

**Wayne, *Music on Plastic*.** *Music on Plastic* is proof that the old adage "guitar playing for the good of the song" doesn't have to be boring. Wayne's beautiful marriage of rootsy guitar and Brit-pop songwriting smarts is practically guaranteed to move you. **TVT.** —DF

**The Detachment Kit, *They Raging. Quiet Army*.** Emotion comes first with this fat-fisted punk posse, and you'll dig their darning twin-guitar tirades. TDK may be the only band that can do two-handed finger taps and keep it undeniably *punk*. **Self-Starter Foundation.** —JG

**Corey Harris, *Downhome Sophisticate*.** Powered by soaring lap-steel solos and gutsy, post-modern blues riffs, Harris' explosive blues grooves branch out into hip hop, reggae, highlife, and more. **Rounder.** —JG



**Ted Killian, *Flux Aeterna*.** Feedback shrieks and EBow howls over hypnotic grooves add up to a great soundtrack to a bad dream. **pfMentum.** —MB

**Quarashi, *Jinx*.** An Icelandic band that mixes rock, hip-hop, industrial, and funk. Think of them as Reykjavic Against the Machine. **Columbia.** —MB

**Andy Timmons, *That Was Then, This Is Now*.** The former Danger Danger shredmeister flays the fretboard on these 16 diverse tunes, displaying amazing technique, cool tones, and a great live vibe. **Favored Nations.** —SH

**Arlen Roth, *Drive It Home*.** The king of the *Hot Licks* instructional video series presents a delicate, down-home vibe on this all-acoustic album. **Solid Air.** —SH



rosewood...





studio for months on end?

No. Even if it's a song I love, I just can't work on it for days at a time. The studio is a limitation for me. I'm at my best if I can get all my parts down quickly. Then and only then will I maybe experiment and tweak a record. It's so important to recognize your limitations and strengths as a musician. For me, that meant realizing I'm a live performer who views making records as a hard and tedious endeavor.

*The track "Puttin' Out Fires" has a killer, extended jam at the end. How did that come about?*

Actually, that song is a perfect example of not having to answer to a label. It could have easily been a three-minute tune, but since there was no A&R person telling me it should be shorter, I just took off at the end and didn't fade it out. It wasn't an attempt at virtuosity, but it felt good. And if it feels good to me, I trust it will feel good to my fans.

#### Rick Holmstrom

*Hydraulic Groove*

The high-gloss production approaches of the late '80s and early '90s robbed some blues albums of the rough edges and dark shadows that define the genre—the very places where the soul of the blues lives. Worse than that, it made some blues fans wary of anything labeled

"contemporary blues." If there's one guy, however, who proves that vintage vibes can come in modern colors, it's Rick Holmstrom. As far-fetched as it may seem, Holmstrom's new disc, *Hydraulic Groove*—with its samples, drum loops, backwards guitars, lo-fi vocals, and other such modern textures—packs more than enough blues sting to please even die-hard traditionalists. Holmstrom's solos have fangs, and whether he's tearing up Chicago blues, rockabilly, New Orleans funk, or his own brand of psychedelic lounge-jazz (as in "Pee Wee's Nightmare"), Holmstrom's toothy tone keeps each one of these addictive grooves centered on the blues.

**Tone Cool.**

—JUDY GOLD



#### Tommy Castro

*Guilty of Love*

Tommy Castro has been quietly carving out his own niche in the blues world for more than

a decade. Along the way, he has earned the praise of John Lee Hooker, Carlos Santana, and B.B. King. His latest outing, *Guilty of Love*, finds Castro adding a touch more rock and a dollop of soul to his blues. In fact, you'll need to go four tracks deep into the album before you even hear a I-IV-V. The intro to "Somebody to Love You" is straight out of the Stones' rhythm school and the lines in "Stay with Me Tonight" sound kind of like Steve Cropper if he played in AC/DC. Castro's gritty, Otis Redding-inspired vocals always threaten to take the spotlight away from his guitar work. It's true that his 6-string work favors pocket over pyrotechnics, but that doesn't prevent him from throwing down with hairy tones and funky stabs in "Whole Lotta Soul," and slow, painful bends in "Dirt Road Blues." Castro has managed to make a modern blues album without sucking the life out of it. No mean feat. **33rd Street.**

—MATT BLACKETT

#### Pulse Ultra

*Headspace*

Merging cerebral riffs, odd time signatures, and virtuosic ability with a truckload of tones and feels—not to mention catchy vocal stylings—Pulse Ultra may be the first heady metal act since Tool to have a shot at radio success. Pulse's 22-year-old guitarist Dominic can headbang with the best of the Ozzfest crowd (check

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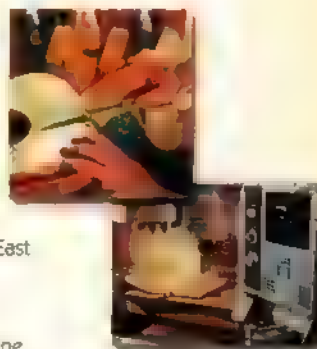


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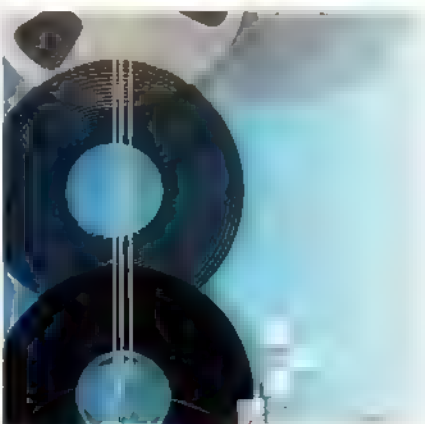


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## Reviews

out "Finding My Place"), but he also spins webs of sound with thoughtful lead lines and clever use of effects ("Never the Culprit"). Though some of the intricate rhythms and chord work hint at Dream Theater, the band always grooves with a spontaneous, STP-like vibe, and their instrumental adeptness doesn't ward you off with over-indulgence. **Atlantic.** —SHAWN HAMMOND



### Ty Tabor

*Safety*

King's X mastermind Ty Tabor serves up a platter full of lush acoustics, haunting leads, and gorgeous vocal harmonies on his second solo outing. However, what's most remarkable about this soul-baring and vulnerable album is how Tabor's tasty playing and fine production work can take simple ideas to such an elusive, magical level. Though he's been lumped into the prog crowd before, this effort primarily spotlights Tabor's great songwriting and melodic sensibilities, while throwing a crunchy bone to King's X fans here and there. **Metal Blade** —SHAWN HAMMOND

### Grand Funk Railroad

*Live—The 1971 Tour*

In its '70s heyday, Grand Funk packed concert venues, sold oodles of records, and was usually quite viciously slammed by rock scribes for being talentless and uncool. *Live—The 1971 Tour* proves the band could be monumentally dorky ("Also Sprach Zarathustra" as intro music?), but its members were far from no-talent slob. Throughout these documented shows in Detroit, Chicago, and New York, the band is absolutely masterful at igniting an audience, and guitarist Mark Farner seems to be on a personal mission to get everyone off. To that end, he unleashes an insane overload of brilliant and pretentious solos, heavy and hilarious riffs, and propulsive rhythm chops. But whether your mouth is open because you're listening in awe or laughing your ass off, you can't deny that Farner and company are fearlessly committed to serving the crowd's need to boogie. Everything else be damned—egos, technique, and, most of all, critics. If you think you've got what it takes to drive an arena audience insane with the pure fury of a single guitar, listen to this CD and be humbled. **Capitol.** —MICHAEL MOLENDEN



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## Reviews



### Sylvain Luc

*Trio Sud*

If you subscribe to the notion that great

artists are *born* great, then Basque guitarist Sylvain Luc certainly fits the criteria. Luc began studying guitar at age five and entered a prestigious European music academy at nine, where he added mandolin, violin, and cello. Influenced by Django Reinhardt (and often likened to Django stylist Biréli Lagrène), Luc has evolved into an astonishingly versatile player whose style reflects the music of his gypsy heritage as well as a variety of other influences. Luc's third solo album, *Trio Sud*, is a beautiful work that melds jazz, swing, and Afro-Caribbean rhythms with rich guitar textures that echo players such as Pat Metheny, John Scofield, Paco de Lucia, and Bola Sete. Buoyed by the deep grooves laid down

by bassist Jean-Marc Jafet and drummer André Ceccarelli, Luc's rich melodies and complex rhythms ebb and flow like a tropical tide. *Trio Sud* is a mesmerizing musical sojourn—one that will likely further Luc's status as one of today's premiere jazz guitarists. **Dreyfus Jazz.**

—ART THOMPSON

### The Flatlanders

*Now Again*

The West Texas town of Lubbock is synonymous with Buddy Holly, and it has also been home to a trio of modern folk heroes—Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and Butch Hancock. The three singer-songwriters originally honed their craft in a Lubbock-based group called the Flatlanders, and they recently joined forces to release *Now Again*, the group's first full-length album since 1972. Embellished with Tex-Mex accents and lots of vibey 6-string interplay between Ely, Gilmore, and Hancock (as well as guitarist Robbie Gjersoe and steel/dobro whiz Lloyd Maines), *Now Again* is a spirited blues/country/rock romp that shows what sparks can fly when three great songwriters revisit their roots. **New West.** —ART THOMPSON

### W.C. Clarke

*From Austin with Soul*

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- Check or money order for \$30.00 per song (U.S. currency only) payable to John Lennon Songwriting Contest. If paying by credit card, \$30.00 per song will be charged to your account.

Entries must be postmarked no later than September 29, 2002

Please read all rules carefully, and then sign your name in the space provided. If entrant is under 18 years old, the signature of a parent or guardian is required.

1 Each song submitted must be contestant's original work. Songs may not exceed five (5) minutes in length. No song previously recorded and released through major national distribution in any country will be eligible. Songs may have multiple co-writers, but please designate one name only on the application. Contestant may submit as many songs in as many categories as he/she wishes, but each entry requires a separate cassette, entry form, lyric sheet, and entrance fee. One check or money order for multiple entries/categories is permitted. (Entrance fee is non-refundable. JLSC is not responsible for late, lost, damaged, misdirected, postage due, stolen, or misappropriated entries.)

- 2 Twelve (12) Grand Prize Winners will receive \$2,000 in cash, \$5,000 in Yamaha project studio equipment, a \$5,000 advance from EMI Music Publishing, and a \$99.95 TonosPRO Membership. One (1) Grand Prize Winner will receive \$20,000 for the "Song of the Year" courtesy of Maxell. Thirty-six (36) Finalists will receive \$1,000 and a \$29.95 TonosPRO Membership. Seventy-two (72) Runners-up will receive \$100 from Guitar Center Stores.
- 3 Contest is open to amateur and professional songwriters. Employees of JLSC, their families, subsidiaries, and affiliates are not eligible.
- 4 Winners will be chosen by a select panel of judges comprised of noted songwriters, producers and music industry professionals. Songs will be judged based upon melody, composition and lyrics (when applicable). The quality of performance and production will not be considered. Prizes will be awarded jointly to all authors of any song. Division of prizes is responsibility of winners. Void where prohibited. All federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.
- 5 Winners will be notified by mail and must sign and return an affidavit of eligibility/recording rights/publicity release within 14 days of notification date. The affidavit will state that winner's song is original work and he/she holds all rights to song. Failure to sign and return such affidavit within 14 days or provision of false/inaccurate information therein will result in immediate disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Affidavits of winners under 18 years of age at time of award must be countersigned by parent or legal guardian. Affidavits subject to verification by JLSC and its agents. Entry constitutes permission to use winners names, likenesses, and voices for future advertising and publicity purposes without additional compensation.
- 6 Winners will be determined by January 15, 2003, after which each entrant will receive a list of winners in the mail. CDs, Cassettes and lyrics

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**Blues,"** W.C. Clarke cut his teeth in the clubs of Austin's east side during the 1950s. He backed soul-singer Joe Tex in the '60s, and, during the '70s and '80s, he worked with Austin blues stars Angela Srehli, Lou Ann Barton, and the Vaughan brothers (Clarke co-wrote the SRV hit "Cold Shot"). This R&B-flavored album finds Clarke at the head of a pack that includes pianist/vocalist Marcia Ball, guitarists Derek O'Brien and Pat Boyack, and the Texas Horns. Armed with a powerful, gospel-approved voice, Clarke delivers his songs with god-fearing intensity. His rhythm playing is smooth and soulful, his lead style pure economy. But when Clarke steps out with a solo, you *feel* every one of his clear, bell-like notes. Cool stuff? **Alligator.** —ART THOMPSON

—ART THOMPSON

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### Rude Awakening

*Rude Awakening* opens with an obvious and boring montage of hyper-excited Megadeth acolytes funneling into the venue to see their heroes. Happily, that's the one and only time this well-produced DVD serves up anything but

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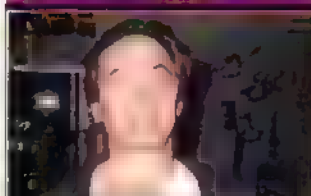


whoop-ass. The band's performance is intense, the camera-work is excellent, and the sound is downright astounding. Not only is the live recording clear and full of impact, but the surround mix is brilliantly conceived. The rear speakers handle crowd noise and reflected band sound, the right and left front speakers deliver a stereo music mix, and the center speaker is reserved for lead vocals and guitar solos. The savvy placement of sonic elements really puts the band in your face. (Sit in your system's sweet spot, wait for a solo to kick off, and you'll hear what I mean.) As an injury to guitarist Dave Mustaine has put Megadeth to rest (see *Fretwire*, p. 24), *Rude Awakening* is a fitting testimonial. **Sanctuary.**

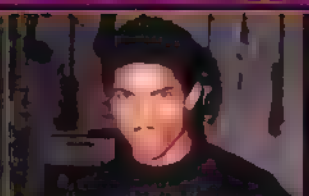
—MICHAEL MOLENDRA

Continued on page 123

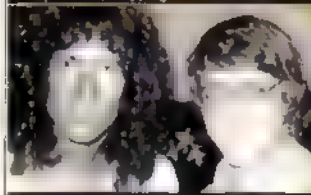
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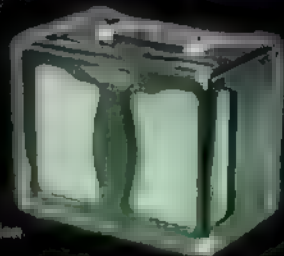
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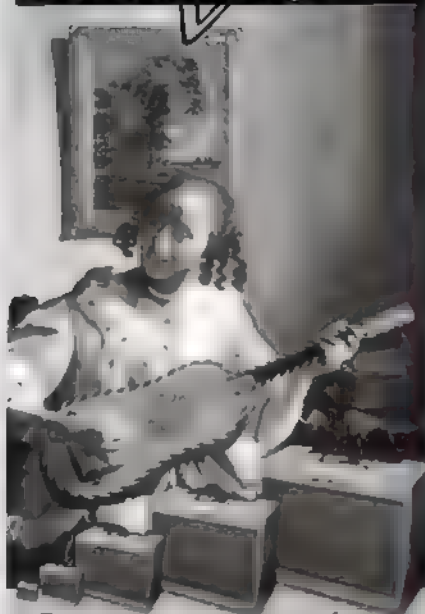
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# High Five

## A Roundup of Gibson Les Pauls

By the GP Staff

It's hardly surprising that a company such as Gibson makes a mindblowing number of guitars. But with no fewer than 45 Les Paul models currently in Gibson's product line, the job of selecting a manageable number for this roundup was a tad challenging. "Lemme see—shall we go for the Studio Gothic, Standard Premium Plus, Smartwood Exotic, or the Studio Limited Color? What about the '54 Oxblood, the '56 Goldtop, or the '59 Flanetop?" Talk about option anxiety!

In the end, we opted to focus on five models, which run the gamut from a shade over a street price of \$1,000 to nearly \$14,000. We auditioned these beauts through a variety of amps, includ-

ing a Bad Cat Hot Cat, a JBL-equipped Fender Twin Reverb, a Marshall JCM 800, a Vox AC30, and a Vox Valvetronix AD120VI modeling combo.

### Les Paul Jr. Special Plus

A dressed-up, two-pickup version of the venerable single-cut-away, single-P-90 Junior, the Jr. Special Plus (\$1,614) radiates a Les Paul-meets-L6S vibe, courtesy of its mahogany slab body and flat figured maple top. It's the lightest Paul in this roundup, and—thanks to its slim neck—the most modern feeling.

Plugged into a Fender Twin, the Plus exhibited great chime and sparkle. It sounded surprisingly spanky on any setting, but

### Snapshot

Check out five new Les Pauls at ascending price points: the Jr. Special

Plus (\$1,614 retail/\$1,049 street price), Studio Limited Colors (\$1,655 retail/\$1,076 street), Standard (\$3,306 retail/\$2,149 street), Custom Authentic '68 Black Beauty (\$4,379 retail/street price N/A), and the 50th Anniversary (\$13,727 retail/street price N/A). The Custom Authentic '68 Black Beauty and the Standard receive Editors' Pick Awards.

the guitar really excelled in the two-pickup mode. Here, subtle volume changes to either pickup resulted in beautiful tones, and favoring the bridge pickup slightly accentuated the twang of the

wound strings. (Anyone who thinks Les Pauls aren't made for clean tones should try this setup.) The Plus is in its element delivering clean to semi-dirty tones, but it also sounds great through

### Contact Info

Gibson Nashville, 641 Massman Dr., Nashville, TN 37210; (615) 871-4500; gibson.com.

| The Ratings Game                                                                                                               | Tone  | Playability | Workmanship | Hardware | Vibe  | Value |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------|-------|
| Les Paul Jr. Special Plus                                                                                                      | ★★★★  | ★★★★        | ★★★★★       | ★★★★★    | ★★★★  | ★★★★★ |
| Les Paul Studio Limited Colors                                                                                                 | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★       | ★★★★        | ★★★★★    | ★★★★  | ★★★★★ |
| Les Paul Standard                           | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★       | ★★★★★       | ★★★★★    | ★★★★★ | ★★★★  |
| Les Paul Custom Authentic '68 Black Beauty  | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★       | ★★★★★       | ★★★★★    | ★★★★★ | ★★★★  |
| Les Paul 50th Anniversary                                                                                                      | ★★★★  | ★★★★        | ★★★★★       | ★★★★★    | ★★★★  | ★★    |

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥ —————> Excellent = ♥♥♥♥♥





# Bench Tests

## High Five

a dined JCM 800—zingy and slicing, with excellent definition. For pop, jazz, or non-metal rock players, the Plus is a winner.

—MATT BLACKETT

## Les Paul Studio Limited Colors

With its metallic green finish, ebony fretboard, and absence of fretboard inlays, the Studio Limited Colors (\$1,655) has a sleek, mean appearance that's a good indicator of the testosterone-laden tones it cranks out. Sporting Gibson's beefy '59 Rounded neck shape, the Studio feels substantial and plays slick and fast.

Plugged into a Bad Cat Hot Cat, the Studio sounded tight and chunky, but the high end seemed a tad muted. Switching to a Marshall JCM 800, however, the Studio came to life with big-sounding power chords and righteous single-note lines. The humbuckers have a hot, thick sound with great string-to-string balance, and almost every note on the neck feeds back musically. Through the Marshall, the Studio just begs to play heavy John Sykes-style hard rock. Yeah! Plugged into a Fender Twin, the Studio performed well, but its girthy character required the amp to be EQ'd on the trebly side with the bright switch on. With those settings, the Studio sounded full, with a cool, piano-like quality.

Those who want a classic-looking Les Paul might be put off by the Studio's souped-up vibe. Once I got a handle on its high-output rock tones, however, the Studio started looking cooler and cooler. And, with a street price of just over a grand, this guitar gives you a tremendous amount of chunk for the buck.

—MATT BLACKETT

## Les Paul Standard

How such a class act as the Les Paul Standard fell in with rock and roll scum is one of the riddles of the ages. And yet, this sophisticat-

ed jewel can definitely get down and dirty. This exquisite duality has delighted rock, prog-rock, fusion, blues, pop, metal, and (insert genre here) players since the first sunburst Standard rolled out of the Gibson plant in 1958.

The 2002 Standard (\$3,306) honors the Les Paul legacy by sticking close to its own legend. Cosmetically, it appears to be a deadringer for the vintage Standards wielded by guitar legends in classic photos. There's the striking carved-maple top with its cherry sunburst finish, the rosewood neck with pearl trapezoid fretboard inlays, nickel hardware, vintage-style "keystone" tuners, and the unadorned trussrod cover. Close inspection reveals impeccable craftsmanship. The lacquer is as smooth and shiny as a bevel-cut on the Hope diamond, the 22 polished frets absolutely glisten, the neck/body joint and the binding are flawless, and the hardware is locked down tight.

And, man, does this stunner feel great. The "fast '60s style" neck of our review model (a "fat '50s style" neck is also available) is extremely seductive and inviting. Riffs and chords spill effortlessly from your fingers onto the fretboard—it's as if the guitar is as much a part of you as your arms and legs (which is kind of delightfully spooky). At 8.72 lbs, the Standard is hardly a lightweight, but I wore it on my shoulder for a four-hour recording session with minimal fatigue.

The sound? Forget about it—the Standard delivers everything you adore about classic Les Paul timbres. Throughout a session gig, I plugged into a Vox AC30 and a Valvetronix, a Marshall JCM 900 combo, a Fender Deluxe Reverb, and a Korg AX1000G, and the Standard was alternately sweet, singing, bratty, and soaring. The Burstbucker V pickups delivered low and low-mid bass tones that were full, yet tight and articulate; midrange timbres that were buoyant with







## High Five

snap and punch; and treble frequencies that shimmered without a hint of shrillness. If I lived in a fairy-tale world, I'd happily play the Standard forever and ever. It almost *hurts* to put this baby down.

—MICHAEL MOLENDRA

## Les Paul Custom Authentic '68 Black Beauty

One of the sexiest Pauls in Gibson's line, the '68 Black Beauty (\$4,379) replicates the one-piece body and dual humbuckers of a 1968 Les Paul Custom, but features nickel-plated hardware—an option that wasn't available until 1976. Nevertheless, the Black Beauty could easily fool

you into thinking you're holding a Paul from the Nixon era. The patina on the metal parts appears to have been produced by decades of handling, and the dulled black-lacquer finish and grimy pickguard further the illusion that this guitar has been used—though not *abused*—for the last 30 years. The only harsh aspects are the period-correct metal knob pointers, which prick your fingers mercilessly as you make volume or tone adjustments.

The Black Beauty's neck is huge, and the 22 jumbo frets are nicely polished and crowned. Only some glue seepage under the second fret diminishes an otherwise excellent job. At nearly 10 lbs, the Black Beauty is heavy, but does it ever feel resonant and sustaining! Plugged into a

Marshall JCM 800—or the burn channel of a Hot Cat—the Beauty showed its beastly side, kicking out a fat, hairy tone that offered *ridiculous* attack and definition. Key to this guitar's scorching vintage tones are its highly microphonic Burstbucker pickups—which yield everything from Tele-style spank to cooing, Clapton-style woman tones to aggressive, bone-shaking crunch. The alnico-powered pickups squeal pretty easily, too, but who cares when they sound this cool? In fact, the Beauty has so much tonal mojo on tap it would be difficult to imagine a style you *couldn't* do on it. Bottom line: If you seek the utmost in Les Paul punch, the Black Beauty is as potent as it gets.

—ART THOMPSON

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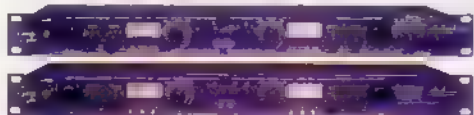


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## Les Paul 50th Anniversary

With the Les Paul ringing the half-century bell, it's only fitting that Gibson create something extraordinary to celebrate the event. And what better way to get collectors salivating than the 50th Anniversary Les Paul (\$13,727)? This opulent ax departs from standard specs by incorporating a highly figured, one-piece maple back and a two-piece curly koa top. The neck is constructed from three pieces of curly maple, and features a koa center strip that runs from the heel block to the headstock. Multiple bindings grace the top, back, and peghead, and the vintage-



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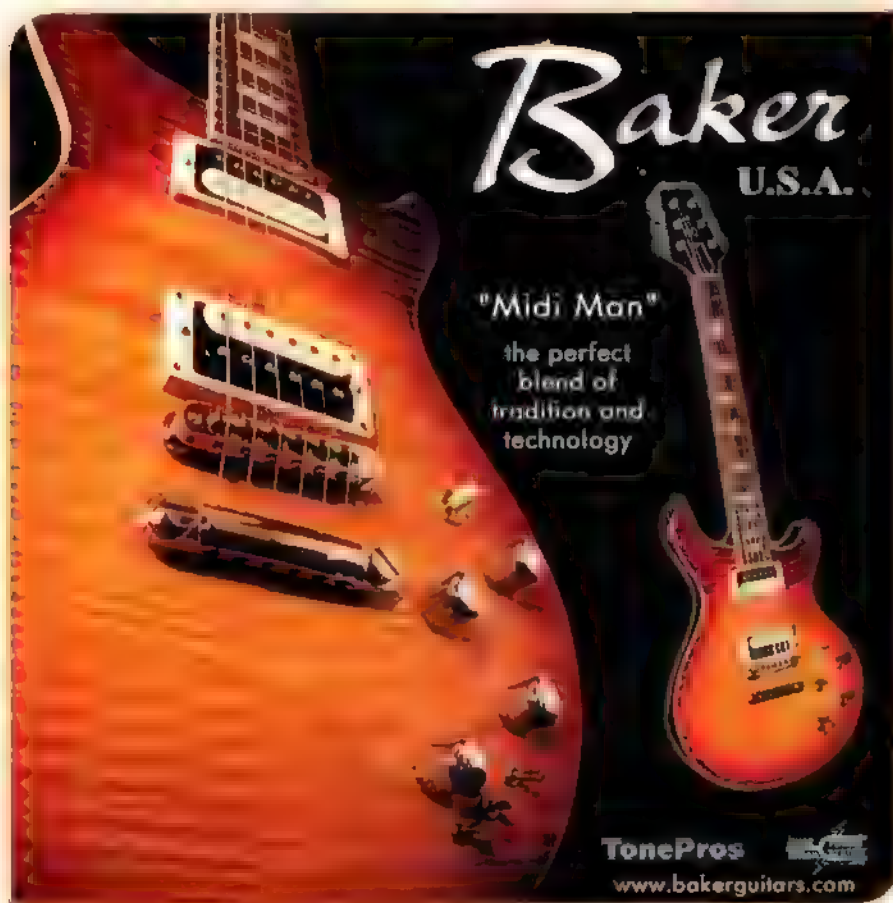
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## High Five

toned, nitro-lacquer finish is flawless.

The 50th Anniversary's Madagascar ebony fretboard is adorned with brilliant abalone cloud inlays, and the Gibson logo and double triangle peghead inlays are also rendered in the deep, green shell. Single-layer binding is applied over the ends of the 22 polished, medium-jumbo frets, and all of the 50th's hardware is gold plated (including the metal back plates). Oddly, there's no model name engraved or inlaid anywhere on this instrument—just a block-letter "Anniversary" stamp on the back of the headstock.

In spite of some bass-string buzzing, the 50th plays quite well. The medium-thick neck is beautifully shaped, and the polished frets with their bound-over ends make for a very silky playing feel. Played through the clean channel of a Bad Cat Hot Cat, the 50th sounded remarkably crisp, delivering a bright, balanced tone with lots of top-end detail. Through a cranked Marshall JCM 800, the 50th Anniversary relaxed a bit, sounding smoother and rounder, and yielding a slightly compressed dynamic feel. It's a stretch to even consider that such a costly and rare guitar (only 50 will be made) will ever see stage time. But if you're a brave enough investment banker to bust this baby out on a gig, rest assured, it's still a Les Paul. —ART THOMPSON



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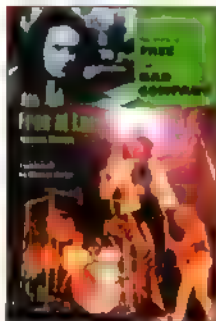


## BOOKS

## Free at Last

Steven Rosen

An appropriate subtitle for this exhaustively researched band biography of Free and Bad Company might be, "Everything Goes Wrong." *Free at Last* certainly isn't a buoyant read, but author Steven Rosen—a frequent contributor to *Guitar Player*—expertly details how bad luck, bad management, egos, drink, and drugs tanked a thrilling and unique band with a future (Free), and stole the joy from a hit machine (Bad Company). Although technical guitar lore is light, guitarists should be inspired and frightened by the passages on the late Paul Kossoff—a transcendent talent who succumbed to his demons. Even if you're not interested in these '70s icons, *Free at Last* serves as an essential cautionary tale for those seeking a career in rock. SAF. —MICHAEL MOLENDEN

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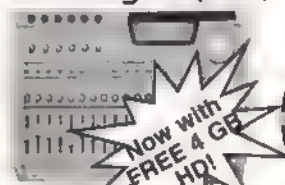
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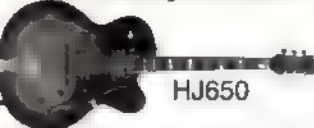
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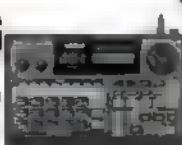
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# Crown Jewel

## Vox Valvetronix AD120VT

By Art Thompson

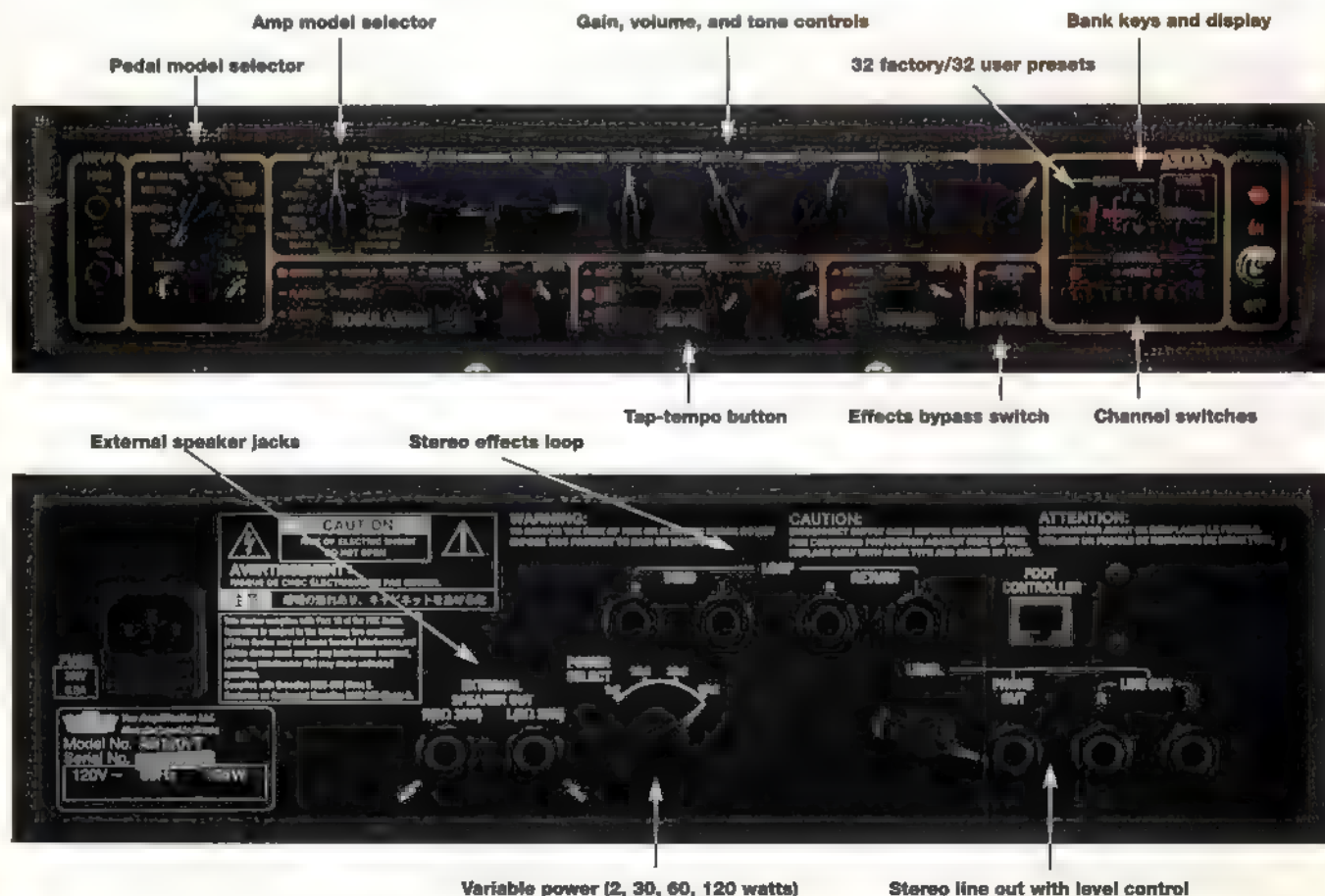
**W**hen it comes to amplifier brands, few marques exude the glory associated with Vox—a name that almost immediately evokes images of the Beatles, the Yardbirds, and, well, the entire British Invasion. Equally enticing is the sheer beauty of Vox styling. With their diamond-pattern grilles, gold

pipings, and gleaming logos, Vox amplifiers are the amp world's equivalent of the Royal Family. Since its mid-'60s heyday, Vox has endured its share of ups and downs, but thanks to the loyalty of Vox fans—and a life-saving resuscitation by Korg—the brand is now a viable competitor in the modern-amp arena.

It's only fitting that Vox's first

### Snapshot

With its multitude of amp and effects models, simple control interface, and realistic tube response, the Vox Valvetronix AD120VT (\$1,199 retail/\$899 street) is a great choice for working players who need to access tons of tones on the fly. The amp's 12AX7-powered Valve Reactor mini power-amp driver circuit and Vari-Amp output stage team up to give the AD120VT great dynamic feel and more than enough volume for stage use. Factor in its affordability and cool British styling, and the AD120VT easily nabs an Editors' Pick Award.





| The Ratings Game        |                                                                                   | Tone | Workmanship | Features | Vibe | Value |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------|----------|------|-------|
| Vox Valvetronix AD120VT |  | ★★★★ | ★★★★        | ★★★★     | ★★★★ | ★★★★  |

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥ —————> Excellent = ♥♥♥♥♥

modeling amp is able to cop the compressed distortion tones of the Vox classics. However, this ultra-flexible amp also has the goodies to go where *no* Vox has gone before. We tested the Valvetronix AD120VT 2x12 combo (\$1,199; also available as the 60-watt AD60VT combo for \$899) using a variety of guitars, including a Fender Strat and a Tele, a Hamer

Archtop (equipped with a bridge-position DiMarzio Bluesbucker), and a PRS McCarty.

### Smooth Hand

Like most current modeling amps, the AD120VT is easy to use. Sampling the 32 factory/32 user presets simply requires pressing the bank up/down keys (to access one of the eight preset banks),

and then hitting any of the four channel buttons that are automatically assigned to the active bank. Toggling through the factory sounds provides a good overview of the various combinations of amps and effects, and the well-crafted presets get you up and running in short order. You can easily make tone, gain, and volume adjustments—as well as

effects tweaks—via the top-mounted controls, and saving your modified sounds is an easy, two-step process.

### Big Vox Sound

Stripping the AD120VT down to its basic amp sounds is easily accomplished by pushing the global effects bypass button. In this mode—and with just a few

Celestion-made Vox Original 12" speakers



Optional VC-4 foot controller



## Bench Tests

### Crown Jewel

tone and volume adjustments—the AD120VT's AC30 model pretty much nailed the meaty shimmer of a reissue AC30TB, delivering a similarly complex

tone and the correct amount of grind for the volume. Likewise, the AC15TB model tracked guitar-volume changes beautifully, and delivered the requisite dose of ringing distortion. The AD120VT's noise-gate chatter at

### Contact Info

Vox USA, 316 S. Service Rd., Melville, NY 11747; (516) 333-9100; voxamps.co.uk.

## Kissing Cousins

**Fender Cyber-Twin:** \$1,749 retail/\$1,224 street (reviewed July '01)

**Hughes & Kettner zenAmp:** \$1,999 retail/\$1,399 street

**Line 6 Vetta:** \$2,399 retail/\$1,599 street (reviewed June '02)

**Roland VGA-7:** \$1,699 retail/\$1,166 street (reviewed April '01)

**Yamaha DG100:** \$1,499 retail/\$999 street (reviewed Oct. '98)

extremely low guitar volumes is a digital giveaway (the gate is bypassable), but in terms of tonal shape and dynamic response, the AD120VT sounded

a lot like an all-tube Vox.

### Jack of All Trades

Many of the other amp sounds are also happening. For example,

## Gizmo Alert Danelectro Trip L Wah and Shift Daddy

The cloud of smoke has hardly settled since the car-shaped Dan-O-Wah roared out of Danelectro's garage last fall. Now the vibey guitar company has put two more fat-tired pedals on the road.

### Trip L Wah

As its name implies, the Trip L Wah (\$69 retail/\$59 street) has three modes. The default is Treble Wah, which is activated by pressing hard in the toe position. The other two modes—Bass Wah and Mid Wah—are each engaged by pressing the corresponding silver button on the hood. Played through a Fender Twin, all three modes sounded rich and sparkly. Picture a classic-sounding wah that can be instantly tweaked for more (or less) bass, mid, or treble emphasis, and you've got the idea. Cranked through a Marshall JCM 800, the Bass Wah mode sounded best, producing a full-spectrum swoosh where the other settings seemed to lose their bite in all the distortion. This ability to compensate for different amplifiers is a primary reason why multi-mode wah pedals are so handy, and the Triple L Wah is the most affordable of its breed

### Shift Daddy

Like Danelectro's Dan Echo, the Shift Daddy (\$149 retail/\$129 street) packs a bunch of tasty echo settings and excels at gritty rockabilly slap or honky-tonk doubling—at least until you move the pedal and everything



goes sharp or flat. Huh? If you've ever played through an analog or digital delay and given the delay-time knob a twist in the middle of a phrase, you've heard the repeats rise or fall in pitch. The Shift Daddy basically lets you perform this trick with your foot.

This effect is otherworldly and psychedelic, but it can be tricky to control. Overdo it, and you'll create warbly, car-sick sounds, as if someone was yanking on your vibrato bar in the middle of a song. In smaller doses, however, the Shift Daddy gives riffs and progressions an alluring, cho-

rus-like shimmer. Ironically, a good way to keep this effect on the road is by simply flooring it—just lean on the pedal with a lead foot and vary how much weight you apply. A rubber bushing beneath the toe allows the pedal to move just a few degrees at a time, allowing for more predictable effects. Activate different echo settings via the exhaust-pipe buttons, and you'll get everything from trippy, Leslie-like Doppler shifts, to drnppng, underwater effects. Simple concept, wild sounds! —JUDE GOLD

**Danelectro** (dist. by Evets Corp.), 1062 Calle Negocio, Unit A, San Clemente, CA 92673; (949) 361-2100; danelectro.com





Black 2x12 offers the husky mids and penetrating top of a Fender Twin, and the Tweed 1x12 and 4x10 settings sound thick and snarling when pushed with a humbucker or P-90. I also dug the cleaner Marshall-based settings, such as UK Blues (presumably based on a JTM-45) and the crisp-sounding UK '70s (which dishes up grinding, plexi-style bite—try this one though a 4x12 for maximum effect).

Heaviness is spoken in the UK '80s, UK '90s, and UK Modern settings (which are based respectively on the JCM 800, JCM 900, and TSL series of Marshall amps), and—especially—US High Gain (a roaring, super-sustain model of the mighty Soldano SLO). All of these models are suitable for hard-rock/metal duty, and, if you want more chunk, there's always the Mesa/Boogie-inspired Recto setting.

The only thing you can really fault about the AD120VT is that it lacks some of the splintering upper-mid presence that define Vox and Marshall amps. That also may explain why it's hard to get a truly harsh tone out of the AD120VT—even when smacking it with single-coils. In addition, you can't mix and

match different cabinet models.

## Effects

With no multi-function keys or hidden parameters to slow you down, activating and adjusting effects on this amp couldn't be easier. You get a rotary switch and a pair of parameter knobs for the pedal models, and pushbutton selectors and parameter knobs for the delays, modulations, and reverbs. Need to turn up an effect or change modulation speed or delay time mid song? No problem, just reach over and do it.

For the most part, the AD120VT's effects kick ass. Tape Echo is extremely juicy, the spring reverb setting is actually springy enough for surf, and the chorus, phaser, tremolo, and other modulation effects are rich and vibey. In particular, the flanger mirrors the over-the-horizon range of an ADA pedal, and the rotary effect offers lush swirl and authentic speed-up/slow-down ramps.

As for the pedal models, the standouts include Uni-Vibe (which duped the elliptical spin of the classic photocell-based phase-shifter) and Vox Wah (which copped the snappy attack and vocal-like qualities of a V-847 pedal). The Treble

## Tech Talk

**T**he Korean-made Valvetronix series amps incorporate a Resonant Structure and Electronic Circuit Modeling System (REMS for short) developed by Korg of Japan—as well as analog Valve Reactor and VariAmp circuits conceived by a joint British and Japanese engineering team. The REMS system allows the AD120VT to model a variety of classic amps and effects, while the aforementioned analog circuits work hand-in-hand in the output stage to provide tube-style dynamics and feel.

The Valve Reactor circuit is basically an HO-scale power amp that uses a 12AX7 dual triode in push-pull configuration to drive a small output transformer. Able to switch automatically between class A and class AB (depending on the amp model selected), the Valve Reactor pumps about 0.4 watts of push-pull tube power. This small signal is then fed into a solid-state VariAmp stage, which raises the output to user-selectable levels of 1, 15, 30, or 60 watts.

According to Vox, the VariAmp circuit is designed to impose minimal color on the signal generated by the Valve Reactor, and it cannot be driven into clipping. Another aspect of the VariAmp is its ability to sense the constantly changing impedance curve of the speaker, and then feed the negative-feedback information back to the secondary side of the Valve Reactor's output transformer. Here, it is selectively applied to the amp models that incorporate negative feedback, which include those based on Mesa/Boogie, Dumble, Marshall, Fender (Twin only), and Soldano designs.

In a nutshell, the Valve Reactor and VariAmp allow the AD120VT to replicate key output-stage details such as class of operation, whether negative feedback is incorporated, and the proper function of presence and/or resonance controls.

Lastly, by incorporating feedback within its *constant-current* output amplifiers (which differ from the constant-voltage designs found in most solid-state amps), the Valvetronix series can also mimic the way a tube amp's output voltage varies with changing speaker impedance—a factor that greatly influences how the amp responds to performance dynamics.

—AT



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**Boost, Tube OD, and Fat OD settings** added great lead grind to many of the cleaner amp models—the latter pedal matched with the UK '70s model is especially hip—and the rather subtle compressor setting was cool for beefing-up clean rhythm tones.

## Floor Power

The VC-4 foot controller (\$199) is an essential extra that allows you to keep your hands on the guitar while you change programs, turn effects on and off, control volume, vary modulation speeds, change delay times, or tune up. Compact enough to stash in the bottom of the cabinet, the VC-4 sports a metal frame, plastic electronic footswitches, and a single-digit display. The unit connects to the amp and receives power via a 16-foot computer cable that uses telephone-style jacks. Touring and endless gigging types may want to purchase a spare cable, which can be obtained at electronics stores that sell computers.

You have to select between using the on-board pedal for volume control or expression, but included is a 1/4" jack on the VC-4's rear panel for hooking up either the optional Vox V-850 volume pedal or other unit of your choice. Exercise this option and the VC-4's onboard rocker

## Stompboxes

- Acoustic
- Auto Wah
- Comp
- Fat OD
- Fuzz
- Octave
- Treble boost
- Tube OD
- U-Vibe
- Vox Wah

## Onboard Effects

- **Three reverbs:** plate, room, spring.
- **Three delays:** delay, multi-head, tape echo.
- Chorus
- Flanger
- Phaser
- Tremolo
- Rotary

## Valvetronix Models

## Amos

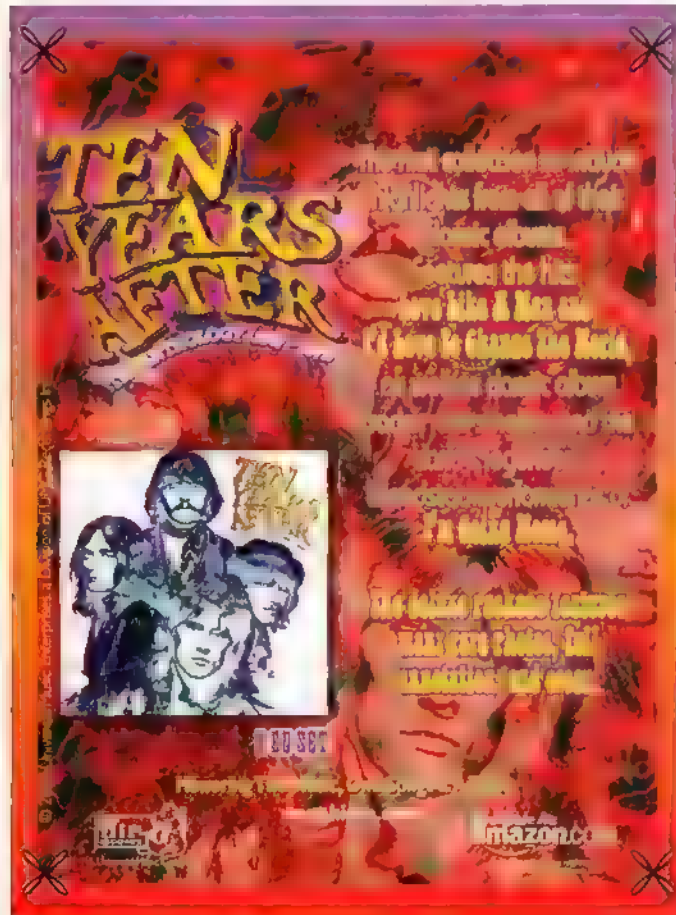
- Black 2x12
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- Boutique OD
- Recto
- Tweed 1x12
- Tweed 4x10
- UK Blues
- UK '70s
- UK '80s
- UK '90s
- UK Modern
- US High Gain
- Vox AC15
- AC15TB
- AC30
- AC30TB

automatically defaults to expression mode.

## Viva Valvetronix

The AD120VT is one of the best marriages of analog and digital technology I've heard. It delivers much of the *feeling* of playing a tube amplifier, and its vast array of sounds ensure that

players of every stripe will find something to dig. Vox poured a lot of R&D into ensuring that the AD120VT's output stage is able to kick out the jams—which has been a downfall of some modeling amps—and the result is a sharp-looking, easy-to-use, and stage-worthy combo that brilliantly advances the Vox legend. Well done! **A**



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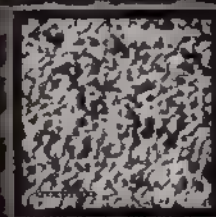
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found it hard to deny Killian's energy and exuberance." —Jason Divers • *Cadence Magazine*

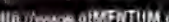


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## Bench Tests

# Loop Dream

## Electrix Repeater

By Joe Gore

**D**espite the high percentage of modern music built from looped phrases, guitarists have been slow to embrace the technique. But that hasn't stopped Electrix from upping the loop-box ante with its powerful and innovative Repeater Loop Based Recorder (\$749).

You can think of the Repeater as a cross between loop proces-

sors and full-blown software- and hardware-based samplers. It's packed with features unprecedented among dedicated looping boxes: independent control of loop duration and pitch; four mono audio tracks (or two stereo tracks) per loop—each with independent level, panning, pitch, and effect-send settings; and the ability to save data on Compact Flash Cards (the shirt-pocket

### Snapshot

The Electrix Repeater (\$740 retail/\$499 street) is a powerful, yet intuitive device that lets you record, manipulate, mix, and store 4-track loops. Among its innovations is the ability to vary loop timing on the fly via tap-tempo, MIDI, or audio input. The Repeater receives an **Editors' Pick Award**.

storage medium common among digital cameras).

The Repeater is brilliantly engineered for live or studio use. The rugged trapezoidal housing can

reside in a rack, or atop a table or an amp. The level and edit knobs and tape-style transport controls are hefty and ergonomic. And even Mr. Magoo could make sense



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### The Ratings Game

#### Sounds

#### Flexibility

#### Programmability

#### Ease of Use

#### Value

Electrix Repeater



★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

The Rate-O-Meter: Dismal = ♥

Excellence = ★★★★★

# Bench Tests

## Loop Dream

of the big LCD display and backlit buttons. There are separate faders and select buttons for each track, and—thankfully—no pesky cursors or parameter matrixes.

## Using It

As on other loopers, pressing and releasing the record button during your first recording pass establishes the loop length. After that, you may overdub or replace the original recording, or move on to one of the other three tracks. You always retain full control over the levels and settings of each of a loop's four tracks, but you can,

in fact, record an infinite number of parts by overdubbing atop extant tracks, or mixing down two or three tracks to a single track via a simple bounce procedure. You can also undo your most recent overdub or edit

No footswitch is included with the Repeater, but if you connect a three-switch, TRS-style pedal (a DigiTech FS-300, for example), you can trigger record, play/stop, and undo by foot. The loop restarts from the beginning each time you press Play—which is great for stuttering effects and percussive hits. With a programmable MIDI controller you can pilot *all* Repeater functions, such as cue-

## Kissing Cousins

**Boomerang 4MB Phrase Sampler Plus:** \$600 retail/\$449 street

**Gibson Echoplex Digital Pro Looping Sampler:** \$1,160 retail/\$799 Street

ing up your next loop in advance or regulating relative track levels.

## Loop Fun

Once you've recorded something cool, you can start mutating it. You might, for example, shift a part up or down an octave, route any combination of tracks to external effects (via the programmable stereo effects loop), or overdub a backward solo. In short, you can stir up all sorts of trouble with just a few button pushes. And even if your button technique sucks, the Repeater bends over backward to help you out. It's fairly adept at discerning your *intended* tempo, and, if it

guesses wrong, you can set the box straight via the tap-tempo switch and tempo knob.

You can also fine-tune the length and placement of individual tracks in 100ths of a beat and sync to external MIDI and audio signals—even an audio feed from a live drummer! Another cool trick is "multiplying" a short loop into a longer one by, say, tracking a 32-bar solo over a 2-bar groove. Never before has a looping gizmo let you so easily modify your tracks *after* they've been recorded.

## Sound Check

The Repeater's sound is nice and crisp, and the pitch and tempo

## Contact Info

Electrix, 6710 Bertram Place, Victoria, BC, Canada, V8M 1Z6;  
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## Loop Dream

shifts are remarkably smooth. Extreme stretches and transpositions can sound grainy, but as often as not, the "digitalness" adds to the color of the effect. I was able to get fine results placing the Repeater between my stompboxes and a combo amp, but, as the Repeater's output is substantially hotter than a guitar's, you may wish to connect the device to an amp's effects loop.

The Repeater has 8MB of internal memory (which translates to about 85 seconds of total record time), and anything you record is lost when you power down the unit. However, by using the Compact Flash Card slot (which can accommodate CFCs up to 512MB), you can preserve your sounds and get up to one-and-a-half hours of non-compressed record time. It's easy to shuttle loops to and from the CFC, and each card holds as many as 999 loops. And because files are stored in the WAV format, you can back them up to a PC via an inexpensive CFC reader peripheral. Smooth!

## Say It Again

The Repeater is a powerful studio tool, and, thanks to its superb ergonomics and operating system, it's also ideally suited to onstage use and on-the-fly composition. Bottom line: If you're looking to looping as a way to expand your sonic palette, the Repeater belongs in your setup. ■

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## Bench Tests

# Royal Steal

## Tacoma RM6 Roadking

By Shawn Hammond

**G**uitarists shopping for a new ax have plenty to be happy about these days. Prices have dropped to the basement, while features and quality have shot through the roof. And now, Tacoma's RM6 Roadking (\$749, including hardshell case) delivers a solid Sitka-spruce top *and* solid mahogany sides and back for way under a grand.

What's the big fuss about solid woods? Most acoustic gurus agree that the tones afforded by solid woods are more complex and organic sounding. In addition, the glues and other design details of laminated woods typically prevent them from maturing over time. So, while a pre-war Martin sounds incredibly rich because of years of aging, a laminate guitar will likely sound much the same 50 years from now as it did when new.

### Snapshot

A princely guitar for a serf's sum, the

Tacoma RM6 Roadking (\$749 retail/\$565 street) is made entirely of solid woods and features a unique paisley soundhole on the upper bout, a bolt-on neck, and a well-balanced tonal spectrum.





# Bench Tests

## Royal Steal

### Construction & Playability

If you're looking for cosmetic allure, the U.S.-made Roadking

may leave you wanting. This dreadnought-style guitar is about as Spartan as it gets. The beefy 5/32"-thick top features a transparent pickguard and is devoid of binding or ornamentation, as are the neck and dot-inlaid rosewood

## Kissing Cousins

**Epiphone Hummingbird:** \$500 retail/ \$359 street

**Gretsch G3603:** \$935 retail/ \$649 street

**Larrivee D-03:** \$1,098 retail/\$879 street

**Martin DM:** \$925 retail/\$599 street (reviewed April '98)

**Seagull Mahogany Cedar:** \$695 retail/\$559 street

## Contact Info

Tacoma Guitars, 4615 East 192nd St., Tacoma, WA 98446; (253) 847-6508; [tacomaguitars.com](http://tacomaguitars.com).

board. The abalone-inlaid string pins and graceful curves of the rosewood bridge and soundhole add understated panache.

The guitar's satin finish produces minimal handling noise, and though the neck's two large-headed hex bolts (which thread into brass inserts) and slightly rough sockets invite comparisons to a DIY bookshelf, the Roadking's

neck is solid as a rock. In fact, the pocket is so tight that it's difficult to slip the edge of a sheet of paper in the joint. Collings and Taylor also use bolt-on designs, but the bolts are hidden. However, one benefit of the Tacoma approach is that it eliminates the heel, which makes upper-fret access easier.

The frets are well polished and crowned, although there was

| The Ratings Game    | Tone | Playability | Workmanship | Materials | Vibe | Value |
|---------------------|------|-------------|-------------|-----------|------|-------|
| Tacoma RM6 Roadking | ♥♥♥♥ | ♥♥♥         | ♥♥♥         | ♥♥♥♥♥     | ♥♥♥  | ♥♥♥♥♥ |

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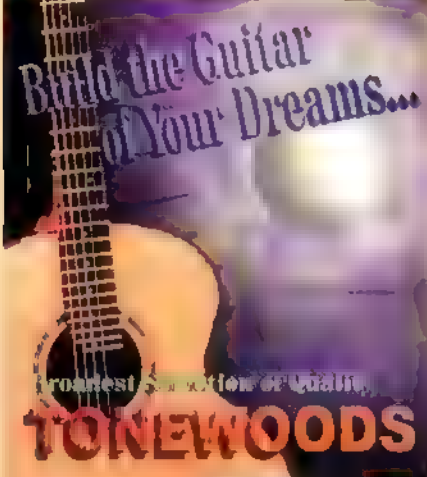
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## Royal Steal

significant fret buzz on the bass strings. I remedied the problem by putting some relief in the neck, which also increased the guitar's already moderately high action.

The interior craftsmanship looks good overall, but some areas could use more attention. Around the soundhole, things were pretty clean, but elsewhere, glue and sawdust were stuck between slots in the kerfing (the wooden strip that reinforces the back/side joint). In addition, the kerfing was interrupted by side braces in spots, and small pieces of kerfing were actually tacked *onto* the side braces.

The 4 lb Roadking feels like nothing strapped on, although it's rather neck heavy. Its slim-profile neck will delight electric shredders, but players accustomed to a more substantial grip might find it slightly fatiguing.

## Soundhole Design

What's up with the off-center soundhole? Well, it's not exclusively a cosmetic feature. "The paisley soundhole design allows us to produce a guitar with 22 frets, join the body at the 15th fret, and fashion a slimmer neck," states Terry Atkins, Tacoma's Director of Product Development. "If these elements were imposed on a conventional dreadnought design, the soundhole would end up too close to the bridge, and the top would be unstable."

Sonically, the offset soundhole delivers a markedly different perspective from the playing position. For example, I discerned rich, accented low-frequencies from the Roadking that were not as apparent to an editor standing a few feet in front of me. In contrast, a Martin D-28 dreadnought delivered more of a midrange emphasis in the playing position.

## Tones

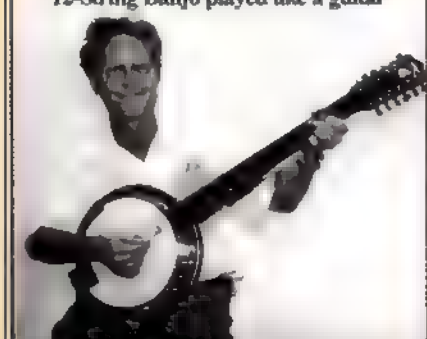
If you close your eyes and dig into the Roadking, it's real easy to imagine you're playing a guitar that costs several hundred bucks more. The dynamic response is fantastic, and its frequency range is wide and balanced. The Roadking sounds great whether you strum with abandon, flatpick with precision, or softly fingerpick. The bass is taut, the mids moderately detailed, and the highs sparkle.

## Basic Beauty

Nothing in the Roadking's price class gives you solid-wood construction, which is why—aside from the Larrivée D-03—the "Kissing Cousins" sidebar only lists models with at least *some* laminate construction. In fact, you could easily pay twice as much to acquire an all-solid-wood experience. The bottom line here is as simple as it gets: Players who want a quality, solid-wood acoustic at a truly budget price currently have a single option—the Tacoma Roadking.

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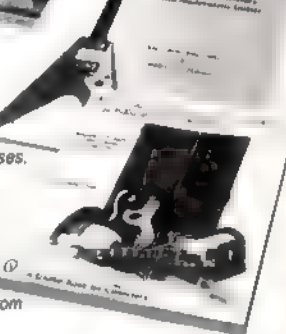
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*It all started as a sort of teenage rivalry*

I'd slave at the piano for five hours daily. Linda practiced far less. Yet somehow she always shined as the star performer at our school. It was frustrating. What does she have that I don't? I'd wonder.

Linda's best friend, Sheryl, bragged on and on to me, adding more fuel to my fire. "You could never be as good as Linda," she would taunt. "Linda's got Perfect Pitch."

"What's Perfect Pitch?" I asked.

Sheryl gloated about some of Linda's unannounced abilities: how she could name *exact tones and chords*—all **BY EAR**, how she could sing any tone—from *mere memory*; how she could play songs—after just *hearing* them!

My heart sank. Her fantastic **EAR** is the key to her success. How could I ever hope to compete with her? But it bothered me. Did she really have Perfect Pitch? I finally asked Linda point-blank if it was true.

"Yes," she nodded to me aloofly. But Perfect Pitch was too good to believe. I rudely pressed, "Can I test you sometime?"

"OK," she replied.

**Now she'd eat her words...**

*My plot was ingeniously simple:* When Linda least suspected, I challenged her to name tones—*by ear*.

I made her stand so she could not see the piano keyboard. I made sure other classmates could not help her. I set up everything perfectly so I could expose her Perfect Pitch claims as a ridiculous joke.

With silent apprehension, I selected a tone to play (she'll never guess F#).

I had barely touched the key "F#," she said. I was astonished. I played another tone.

"C," she announced, not stopping to think.

Frantically, I played more tones, skipping here and there all over the keyboard. But somehow she knew the pitch each time. She was **AMAZING!**

"Sing an E#," I demanded, determined to mess her up. She sang a tone. I checked her on the keyboard—but she was right on!

Now I started to bail. I caked out more tones, trying hard to make them increasingly difficult. Still she sang each note perfectly—on pitch.

I was totally boggled. "How in the world do you do it?" I blurted.

"I don't know," she

sighed. And that was all I could get out of her!

The dazzle of Perfect Pitch hit me like a ton of bricks. My head was dizzy with disbelief. Yet from then on, I knew that Perfect Pitch was real.

**I couldn't figure it out...**

*How does she DO it?* I kept asking myself. On the other hand, why can't everyone recognize tones by ear? It dawned on me: people call themselves *musicians* and yet they can't tell a C from a C#? Or A major from F major?! That's as strange as a

portrait painter who can't name the colors of paint on his palette! It all seemed odd and contradictory.

Humiliated and puzzled, I went home to work on this problem. At age 14, this was a hard nut to crack.

You can be sure I tried it for myself. With a little sweet-talking, I would get my three brothers and two sisters to play tones for me—to name by ear. But it turned into a guessing game I just couldn't win.

Day after day I tried to learn Perfect Pitch. I would play a tone over and over to make it stick in my head. But later I couldn't remember any of them. And I couldn't recognize any of the tones by ear. Somehow they all sounded the same after awhile, how were you supposed to know which was which—just by *listening*?

I would have done anything to have an ear like Linda, but it was way beyond my reach.

So, finally, I gave up.

**Then it happened...**

*It was like a miracle... a twist of fate... like finding the lost Holy Grail.* Once I stopped *straining* my ear, I started to listen **NATURALLY**. Then the incredible secret to Perfect Pitch jumped right into my lap.

I began to notice faint "colors" within the tones. Not *visual* colors, but colors of *pitch*, colors of *sound*. They had always been there. But this was the first time I had ever really "let go"—and *listened*—to discover these subtle differences.

Soon—to my own disbelief—I *too* could recognize the tones by ear! It was simple. I could hear how F# sounds one way, while Bb has a *totally different sound*—sort of like "hearing" red and blue!

The realization struck me: **THIS IS PERFECT PITCH!** This is how Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart could mentally envision their masterpieces—and



"How in the world do you do it?" I blurted. I was totally boggled. (age 14, 9th grade)



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know tones, chords, and keys—all by ear!

It was almost childish—I felt sure that *anyone* could unlock their own Perfect Pitch by learning this simple secret of "color hearing."

Bursting with excitement, I went to tell my best friend, Ann (a flutist).

She *laughed* at me. "You have to be *born* with Perfect Pitch," she asserted. "You can't develop it."

"You don't understand Perfect Pitch," I countered

I showed her how to listen. Timidly, she confessed that she too could hear the pitch colors. With this jump start, Ann soon realized that she had also gained Perfect Pitch for herself.

We became instant celebrities! Classmates loved to call out tones for us to magically sing from thin air. They played chords for us to name by ear. They quizzed us on what key a song was in. Everyone was endlessly fascinated with our "supernatural" powers, yet to Ann and me, it was just normal.

Back then I never dreamt I would later cause such a stir in the academic world. But as I entered college and started to explain my discovery, many professors *laughed* at me.

"You must be *born* with Perfect Pitch," they'd say. "You can't develop it."

I would listen politely. Then I'd reveal the simple secret—so they could hear it for themselves. You'd be surprised how fast they changed their tune!

In college, my so-called "perfect ear" allowed me to skip over two required music courses. Perfect Pitch made everything easier for me—my ability to perform, compose, arrange, transpose, improvise, sight-read (because—without looking—you're sure you're playing the correct tones)—and my enjoyment of music skyrocketed. I learned that music is very definitely a HEARING art.

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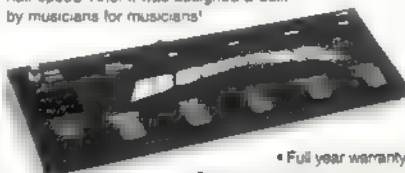
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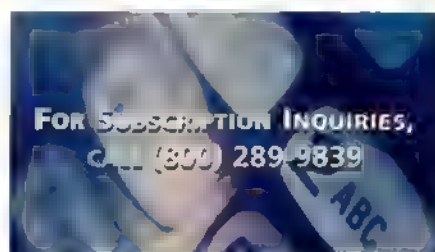
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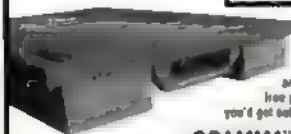
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GUITAR PLAYER, OCTOBER 1986

Ry Cooder was on the phone, looking for a guitar player to perform in-your-face licks on the soundtrack to the film *Crossroads*. I suggested Stevie Ray Vaughan. Cooder said, "Wilder." "How about Johnny Winter?" "Wilder!" I happened to have Steve Vai's *Flex-able* on my turntable. I cranked it up, played "The Attitude Song," and held up the phone so Cooder could hear. When it was finished, he had two comments: "That was at the right speed?" (it was), and, "Gimme that guy's phone number!"

Vai, of course, went on to play on the soundtrack, appear in the film, win stacks of awards, and gain worldwide recognition as the most revolutionary rock guitarist in years. Here are some excerpts from his October '86 cover story.

—TOM WHEELER

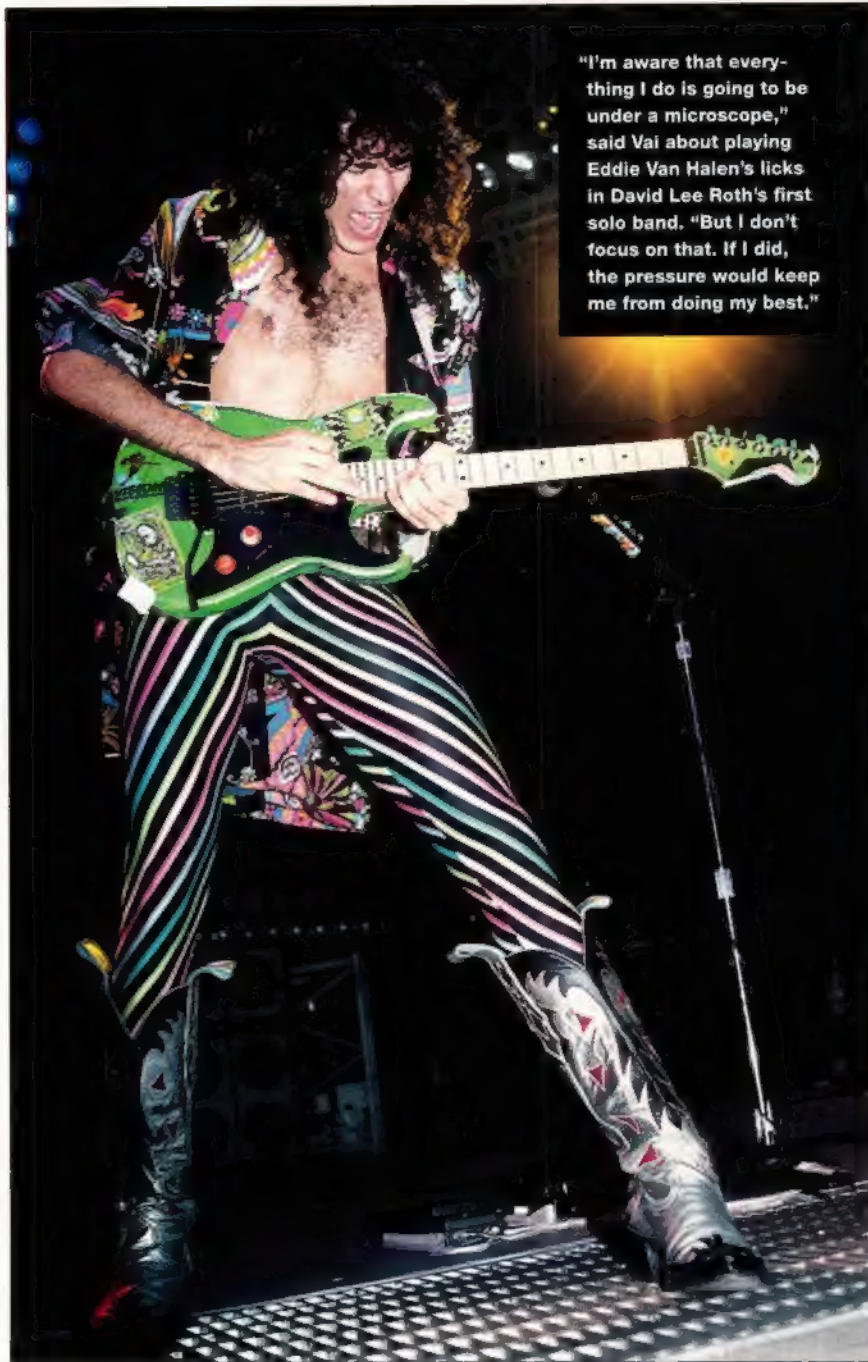
*Does much trial and error go into your parts?*

My best stuff usually comes when I pick up the guitar and play. "Goin' Crazy" was like that. I had been working with Ry Cooder on *Crossroads*, and he inspired me. I'd be playing all these notes, and Ry would sit down and start tapping his foot and playing these grooves—and I felt embarrassed. I thought, "Man, this guy has got *serious soul*." One day he was warming up, and I couldn't have paid enough money to be able to watch what he did in half an hour.

*A few seconds into the "Big Trouble" solo you get a very different tone for a few notes.*

Where it sort of sounds like an Indian from Venus? I took the Floyd Rose tremolo bar, turned it around so the handle was back over the fine tuner for the high E, and I bounced the bar on my hand. I have my guitars rigged so I can pull up on the bar and the strings go sharp. You can raise the pitch when the bar is in standard position, but it's cooler when you turn it around and bounce it. I go through Floyds once a week—they're demolished.

*Are you ever surprised in the studio when you listen to yourself on playback?*



"I'm aware that everything I do is going to be under a microscope," said Vai about playing Eddie Van Halen's licks in David Lee Roth's first solo band. "But I don't focus on that. If I did, the pressure would keep me from doing my best."

Yes. A lot of times it doesn't sound like something I was capable of doing. The music I create is a gift to me. I try not to let my ego think that it's me doing it, because that's where problems come in. People get carried away and think, "This is great—I'm capable of this," and they start resting on their laurels, putting energy into other areas, taking drugs, and wasting energy.

*When did you make the commitment?*

I never thought about being a musician. I just was. People say, "When did you get involved in music?" It must have been lifetimes ago. When I came out of the chute, I must have had a pair of dark glasses on and a Strat in one hand and a tattoo on the other. I could do anything and be happy, but I'll always be a musician. I have no choice.



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